

How Does Perceived Formality Shape Upward Challenge in a UK Police Force?

Sarah Brooks

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Abstract

A recent number of high profile scandals have fuelled a growing desire to understand why voice goes unheard within organisations. Upward challenge is one form of voice which can be helpful for superiors as it allows them to hear about things that could be harmful for the organisation. However, challenging a superior can feel risky because of the formality associated with their role, and the perceived formality of the communication channel used to challenge. Previous studies have suggested the individuals remain silent when faced with situations where they feel voice is risky. However, little is known about how individuals perceive formality and why this might be viewed as risky. Therefore, the present study aimed to understand how perceived formality of relationship with superior and communication channel shaped upward challenge. A qualitative study comprising 19 interviews, card sort activities and one focus group using the four lowest ranks of one UK police force, found that perceived formality appeared to be situational. For example, where a superior was considered likely to use their authority to enforce action, or where certain communication characteristics were present, upward challenge could feel more formal. Perceived formality was also found to be underpinned by a number of organisation design factors creating distance between subordinates and their superiors, making the process of upward challenge feel risky. Nevertheless, the findings highlighted that some participants used a range of strategies to engage in upward challenge which were designed to minimise the risk. One strategy in particular highlighted that upward challenge was most likely to take place in private. There were also participants who did not challenge upwards and reasons appeared to be shaped by a cost-benefit analysis process, indicating that the risks outweighed the benefits. The findings can be used to throw into question a common assumption in the voice and silence literature that subordinates remain silent when voice is perceived to be risky.

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Chapter One Introduction

This introduction chapter states the purpose and aims of the thesis. It also serves as a way of explaining my choice of topic, which was based on initial observations of the literature but further informed by my experience as a practitioner. I later identified the main research question in response to calls from scholars in the voice and silence field to follow a more strategic approach to development of the literature. I have described the methodology and qualitative research process used to carry out the present study before presenting the findings and identifying theoretical and practical contributions.

Voice and silence is a very popular topic at the moment given increasing awareness of its links to a number of personal and organisational outcomes. For example, there have been links to turnover (Hirschman, 1970; McClean, Burris, & Detert, 2013; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous III, 1998), individual job satisfaction (Bjørkelo, Einarsen, Nielsen, & Matthiesen, 2011; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Rusbult et al., 1998), procedural justice (Bies & Shapiro, 1988), organisational justice (Harlos, 2001), commitment to the organisation, effective organisational communication (Gaines, 1980; Tourish & Robson, 2006), organisational error detection and organisational learning (Edmondson, 2003; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005), creativity and innovation (Nemeth, 1997), organisational effectiveness (Glauser, 1984), and organisational performance (Enz & Schwenk, 1991). In addition, there have been a number of very high profile organisational scandals that have been attributed, in part, to failures of upward challenge within organisations. For example, the tragic loss of seven lives in the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster in 2003 (Starbuck & Farjoun, 2005); the loss of 1200 lives between 2005 and 2008 as a result of failings within the UK National Health Service (Francis, 2013) and at least 1400 child sex abuse cases going unaddressed between 1997 and 2013 (Jay, 2013).

Many of the studies carried out to understand the causes and outcomes of voice and silence have not considered that different types of information might be related differentially to general principles of voice and silence. Morrison (2011) argued that the field of voice and silence could broaden its theoretical and practical impact by exploring specific forms of voice. Therefore, one form of voice, upward challenge, has been considered for the present study.

Upward challenge describes the ways in which individuals, when faced with a managerial or an organisation decision with which they disagree, bring their concerns to management. There is of course the option that they may also intentionally withhold them from management and choose not to challenge. The importance of studying upward challenge can be understood by viewing subordinate opinions as having the potential to lead to organisational improvement or decline. Subordinates bring a wealth of experience and skill to any organisation that can be used to organisational advantage. For example, pointing out customer problems, unethical practices and subordinate discontent (Kassing, 2002). However, studies have shown that superiors are the people to whom most subordinates are reluctant to voice (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003). As a result, organisations are not able to take advantage of subordinates highlighting potential problems or matters of concern and therefore silence can be considered a waste of their talents and missed opportunities for the organisation (Shahinpoor & Matt, 2007).

The role of the superior in the organisation can be considered to be a formal one as denoted by the organisational chart representing increasing levels of power as individuals become more senior in the hierarchical structure (Rank, 2008). Research into the reasons why subordinates withhold voice from superiors has identified fear as one of the main drivers of silence, in particular fear of being ostracised from a group, retaliated against or being labelled a troublemaker (Detert & Treviño, 2010; Milliken et al., 2003). In response to these

findings, a number of studies have attempted to find out what might encourage subordinates to speak up. For example, it has been found that subordinates feel that conversations are less risky when they are considered to be informal. For example, where informal relationships exist between subordinates and their superiors (Marchington & Suter, 2013), conversations take place in informal settings (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) or conversations are informal in nature (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998). However, there has been a distinct lack of literature that has looked at the formal nature of conversations, formal settings or formal relationships and what it is about these that make subordinates uncomfortable. The main research question for the study was therefore:

RQ 1: How does perceived formality shape upward challenge?

The observation that formality shaped voice and silence led to me asking myself a question “how does a subordinate know if they are having a formal conversation with their superior?” There are two ways in which a subordinate might perceive formality. Firstly, if they consider themselves to have a formal relationship and secondly, if they are using a formal communication channel. Attempts to distinguish informal and formal relationships between subordinates and superiors has been done through the use of theories such as Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and Power Distance Theory (Hofstede, 1983). These theories are often supported by psychometrically validated measurement scales where researchers are able to draw links between relationship quality and outcomes. However, without the use of scales in everyday life, subordinates and superiors rely more on their intuition to determine relationship quality but we have little insight into what factors they might use to define formality. Although there have been some attempts to define formal and informal communication in terms of both channels and characteristics of each type of communication, there are many different views in the literature about what constitutes formal and informal communication. Given the lack of clarification about what constitutes a formal

relationship with superior or formal communication, it would appear that attempting to establish working definitions with the participant sample before attempting to draw any conclusions about its influence on the voicing of upward challenge is important. Therefore, two additional research questions were identified:

RQ 2.1 How can a formal relationship with superior be defined?

RQ 2.2 How can formal communication be defined?

1.1 Structure of the UKPS

In order to investigate the main research question, the present study was carried out in one force of the UK Police Service (UKPS). The UKPS is a mature and stable industry with a tall hierarchy, suggesting that levels of silence might be high (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Furthermore, police officers have been shown to feel little freedom to express disagreement with their superiors (Athanasziades, 1973). However, the fact that officers in the UKPS are expected to serve a minimum of 35 years' service could suggest that they would be more likely to voice than remain silent when faced with issues that they feel strongly about (Hirschman, 1970). Therefore, it was felt that the UKPS would provide a suitable sample given that both voice and silence could be prevalent.

Although each of the 45 police forces within the UKPS will be structured slightly differently, they will all share some fundamental organisational design characteristics. The UKPS has a tall hierarchical structure with ranks ranging from Chief Constable at the top to Police Constable at the lower end, eight ranks beneath. When trying to assimilate this to literature which has been written for a non-policing audience, the Chief Constable would be the equivalent of a Chief Executive Officer (Loveday, 2013). Each rank of officer can be classed as working at either an operational, tactical or strategic level depending upon their level of seniority. Operational level officers will deal with local frontline policing issues and

will be those officers that are most visible to the public on a daily basis. Tactical level officers will focus more on district-wide issues and medium term plans. Strategic level officers make up the top three levels of the police force and they focus on long-term plans dealing with district-wide and even national-level issues. It is important to note that two forces within the UKPS, the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police, have a slightly different rank structure and naming convention above the level of Chief Superintendent but this is not relevant for the present study and so the details have not been provided. Table 1 provides an illustration of a typical rank structure.

Table 1: *Typical rank structure for the UK Police Service from the top down.*

| Command Structure | Rank |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Strategic | Chief Constable |
| | Deputy Chief Constable |
| | Assistant Chief Constable |
| Tactical | Chief Superintendent |
| | Superintendent |
| | Chief Inspector |
| Operational | Inspector |
| | Sergeant |
| | Police Constable |

Each officer will belong to one police force and within that police force, they will work in a division or a district, usually associated with a particular geographic area. They will be based at either a local police station or a central office such as the Headquarters for the force. Typically, Police Constables and their Sergeants would be based at the same location, but from Inspector upwards, the increased spans of control mean that subordinates are often located in different places to their superiors. Many officers will also follow a rotating shift pattern which consists of a number of early shifts, late shifts and night shifts in a set period. An example shift pattern might be 6am – 2pm for two days, 2pm – 10pm for two days and 10pm - 6am for two days followed by four rest days. Above the level of Inspector, it would be more usual for officers to work a regular day shift. For example, 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday with weekends off. However, many officers of Inspector level and above can volunteer for roles alongside their substantive policing duties which may mean they also work different hours to those described above. For example, firearms duties or public order duties may involve them being called out at short notice and being provided with time off in lieu the following day.

1.2 Purpose and Research Objectives

The main purpose of this research was to develop a deeper understanding about the role of formality on upward challenge. Whilst researching the literature, it became apparent that concepts such as formal and informal are often used without qualification, suggesting an assumption that everyone has the same perception. Therefore, this study is an attempt at testing that assumption with a view to understanding how the existing voice and silence literature might have overlooked a fundamental element of an individual's decision making process about whether to speak up or remain silent. The study was carried out in the UK Police Service as this was considered an organisation where formality was likely to be high, given the tall hierarchy, professionalism with which officers are expected to conduct

themselves and the high public scrutiny under which they perform their duties. The use of interviews is common in qualitative research, but it assumes that participants are able to explain a phenomenon directly. However, I felt that participants would be unaware of some of the influences on their perceptions of formality so I attempted to triangulate the data by using four methods; a card sort activity, thinking aloud protocols, semi-structured interviews and focus group.

In order to answer the main research question, the overarching research objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the literature in order to identify a theoretical basis by which one can understand when a subordinate might perceive a formal relationship with their superior or formal communication and its subsequent influences on upward challenge.
2. To provide empirical evidence of how subordinates understand what is meant by a formal relationship with their superior and formal and informal communication channels and how they believed this shaped upward challenge.

1.3 Significance of This Research

This study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it is a timely study into an area where little empirical evidence exists yet there have been calls for a focus on the role of formality on voice and silence (Klaas, Olson-Buchanan, & Ward, 2012; Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2014). Secondly, the research has highlighted that organisational design features are likely to play a role in voice and silence, another topic which has received scant attention to date (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Third, as a case study, this study helps to highlight the idiosyncratic nature of voice and silence between subordinates and their superiors, indicating the benefit in carrying out research in specifically large organisations or industry-types where culture and environmental context are specific influences over voice.

Finally, the area of upward challenge has received very little direct attention yet is thought to be one of the most important forms of voice given its potential to change courses of action which may prevent organisations from serious harm.

1.4 Why Did I Study The Role Of Formality On Upward Challenge In The UKPS?

From an early age I have always been interested in communication. It started out with a fascination about the postal service. I had pen friends in various countries across the world, keen to learn about different people and the things they did every day. I collected stamps because I was fascinated by the different shapes and pictures on them that helped me communicate with people in other countries. I later developed an interest in languages, and realised I could speak to my pen friends in their own language. I went on study French and Spanish at University, spending a year abroad, realising sometimes that the only language we have in common with people is maybe our second or third language but yet we manage to get our points across. After University, I started working and realised that communication was equally important in organisations. After many years of working in various operational roles, I started working as a management consultant for an organisation that focused on diagnosing problems in information flow as a way to improve the efficiency of organisations. I quickly became aware that upward information flow was problematic, and it largely continued to be so throughout my experience as a consultant. In February 2012, I was successful in applying for a Business and Management Development fellowship at the Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield to complete a full-time PhD. This role provided me with the opportunity to complete a doctoral thesis and I chose to carry out research into the reasons that upward communication within organisations is often problematic.

As I was reading the literature on voice and silence, it became apparent that the main person from whom subordinates withhold information is their superior. On further reading of the literature, studies advocated the need for superiors to encourage voice by being open and

approachable and allowing subordinates to voice their opinions. However, I did not feel an understanding of why and how voice was discouraged by superiors had been explored satisfactorily. Without an understanding of the reasons subordinates feel unable to voice, we cannot be clear in what situations the solutions will work. I have experienced first-hand the difficult nature of knowing when and how to disagree with a superior and observed the impact of failure to speak up in many of the organisations in which I worked. Some of my time as a consultant was spent in the UK Police Service and knowing the serious nature of the decisions they make, and the far-reaching impact of their actions, I felt it might be a good place to see how they dealt with disagreement with managerial and organisational decisions.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

To answer the research objectives, Chapter Two will provide an overview of the literature relating to voice and silence, providing definitions of voice and silence, and explaining the importance of studying upward challenge. Chapter Three will present an argument for the need to study formality and its influence on upward challenge. Chapter Four will present the methodology used to investigate the research questions. Chapter Five provides more details about the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter Six presents the research findings through the use of a conceptual model. Chapter Seven will discuss the findings. Chapter Eight will present the theoretical and practical implications of the research, discuss strengths and limitations of the present study and opportunities for further research.

Chapter Two Voice and Silence

2.1 The Importance of Voice and Silence for Organisations

In order to study voice and silence, it is important to define the concepts and highlight the key debates in the field which are relevant for this thesis. These include the informal or formal nature of voice, the nature of the information being passed to the superior, and the motivation for voicing or remaining silent.

The Origins of Voice

The origins of the literature exploring the concepts of voice, and to a latter extent, silence, are largely attributed to the work of Hirschman (1970) and his theory about Exit, Voice and Loyalty (EVL). Up until the 1970s, the prevailing view of organisational performance was a rational economic one which held that organisational success was driven by economic factors. For example, when organisational performance declined it was assumed by the management that its subordinates, if no longer satisfied with the organisation, would leave and find work elsewhere, in line with traditional market forces. This perspective was shaped by the dominant view that organisations were like machines and that subordinates were carrying out mundane and highly controlled tasks. In the eyes of superiors, subordinates contributed little towards organisational performance over and above carrying out their immediate role and as management viewed them as unimportant, superiors assumed that subordinates would also view their job as equally replaceable by another position in a different organisation. The phenomenon of subordinates leaving one organisation in favour of another organisation became known as *exit* and superiors used to view this as an indicator of potential organisational performance. For example, if there were high levels of exit, this highlighted to superiors that subordinates were not satisfied. In fact, at the time, exit was the only indicator that superiors used to understand whether subordinates were unhappy with an

organisation. However, Hirschman proposed a different theory that suggested that exit was not the only way to gauge dissatisfaction amongst subordinates. At the time there was an ongoing debate in the field of economics about whether it was market forces alone or a combination of market and non-market forces that were responsible for organisational performance. Similarly, the field of political science was arguing that “when the market fails to achieve an optimal state, society will, to some extent at least, recognise the gap and non-market social institutions will arise attempting to bridge itthis process is not necessarily conscious” (Arrow, 1963, p.947 as cited in Hirschman, 1970). Hirschman’s argument exploited the divide between the economists and political scientists by stating that in this case, society meant subordinates, and voice was the way in which they attempted to bridge the gap.

Hirschman (1970) developed a model that predicted when voice and exit were most likely to occur. Hirschman (1970) defined voice as “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilise public opinion” (p.30). This definition highlighted that where a subordinate was dissatisfied, they would use voice as a way of bringing about change by alerting those more senior to them in the organisation about the things with which they were dissatisfied. What he found was that the subordinates who tended to voice rather than exit, when they had the opportunity to do either, felt committed to their organisation and he termed this variable *loyalty*.

This model was underpinned by barriers to entry and exit and Table 2 shows the type of conditions which were most likely to result in either voice or exit.

Table 2: *Conditions under which voice and exit are likely.* Adapted from Hirschman (1970)

| | | Exit | |
|--------------|------------|--|---|
| | | Yes | No |
| Voice | Yes | <p>Voluntary Associations, competitive political parties and some business enterprises, for example, those selling output to a few buyers</p> <p>(Easy entry and easy exit)</p> <p>1</p> | <p>Family, tribe, nation, church, parties in non-totalitarian one-party systems</p> <p>(Easy entry. High barriers to exit)</p> <p>3</p> |
| | No | <p>Competitive business enterprise in relation to customers</p> <p>(Easy entry and easy exit)</p> <p>2</p> | <p>Parties in totalitarian one-party systems, terrorist groups and criminal gangs</p> <p>(High cost of entry. Exit not possible)</p> <p>4</p> |

Cell 1 described a situation where there was easy entry and exit which would normally indicate a preferred option to exit, but the voice option was felt to be equally possible here because the subordinates had joined that particular organisation or institution because they were committed to its goals and objectives, and were therefore likely to speak up in favour of remaining where they were. Cell 2 also denoted easy entry and exit, but the main difference was the lack of commitment to goals due to the free market providing plentiful opportunity for similar roles and therefore, voice was less likely. Cell 3 described a situation where entry was easy because it was a birth right or a decision taken by parents, but the barriers to exit were high because of the risk of loss of social capital such as life-long associates, excommunication, defamation and deprivation of livelihood that is associated with leaving these types of groups. Therefore, voice was the most realistic option. Finally, Cell 4 described a situation where there was a high cost of entry but in this case, exit was not possible, as this might have resulted in loss of life due to the perceived disloyalty which would be attached to attempts to leave. In fact, even to voice dissatisfaction would be tantamount to exit and would likely lead to the same fate, so voice would be low or completely absent as well.

Development of the Voice and Silence Literature

Since Hirschman (1970) developed the original definition of voice, there has been a lack of agreement about the nature of voice, resulting in the development of two separate streams of literature. One literature which has become associated with the Organisational Behaviour (OB) discipline has focused on the role of voice as being informal and discretionary (Morrison, 2011). Another literature which has developed within the Human Resources and Employment Relations (HRM/ER) disciplines have viewed voice as formal (Mowbray et al., 2014). The divide between the literatures has reduced what we know about the nature of formality. For example, the OB literature which has focused on informality has

not examined how formality might shape voice. In the same way, the HRM/ER literature has not considered how voice may take place informally. Wilkinson, Townsend and Burgess (2013) found that there was a clear overlap in the way that subordinates and superiors used formal and informal communication channels. For example, they found that people were using informal channels for matters that were personal, but also work process problems were raised informally. However, work problems were raised formally too if they were felt to benefit a wider group of subordinates. Therefore, it has been argued that it is likely that voice takes place formally and informally, making the study of formality a worth area of consideration (Mowbray et al., 2014).

2.2 Defining Voice

A recent definition developed by Morrison (2014) attempted to bring together many of the current elements that have been studied in the voice literature into the same definition. She defined voice as “informal and discretionary communication by an employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change” (p.174). In order to understand the key elements that are important to understand voice and silence, the definitions will be broken down into its respective elements to highlight key debates and areas of interest in the literature.

Informal and Formal. Morrison (2011) referred to voice as informal and discretionary. Voice can be considered informal in the sense that it is not a formal part of a subordinate’s role meaning that they will only offer voice when they feel the need arises, and as such, it is considered to be discretionary. The assumption that voice is informal means that it is not believed possible to predict voice, and therefore, until recently, ways in which organisations and superiors could harness or encourage it were not explored in the OB literature. On the other hand, voice can also be considered to be formal. The literature on

formal voice was developed in conjunction with the trade union movement and as such, formal voice is often associated with the way that organisations co-ordinate and manage voice (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004). As a result, there has been much consideration of formal communication channels and how these can be used to encourage voice.

The literature on informal voice assumes that voice is a verbal exchange carried out in face to face settings (Morrison, 2011) and very little attention has therefore been paid to the way in which voice is delivered (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). In contrast, the literature on formal voice has focused on the different communication channels through which voice can take place. As a result, examples abound in the HRM/ER literature about what constitutes formal voice mechanisms. A list recently provided by Mowbray and colleagues (2014) highlighted that formal voice can be considered to take place in writing as well as verbally. For example, channels for formal voice included grievance process, email, attitude surveys, intranet, and works councils. Mowbray and colleagues (2014) also provided some examples of informal voice mechanisms including informal discussions and empowerment by supervisor. It was interesting to note that they considered email to be both a formal and informal mechanism, although it is not a channel that has been discussed much in the voice literature.

It has been argued that a lack of formal communication channels could prevent subordinates from speaking up suggesting that formal communication channels are thought to be effective at encouraging voice (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). From an organisational perspective, this would suggest that the informal discretionary nature of voice might not be the most effective way of managing voice, as it represents an adhoc approach to finding out subordinate ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems and opinions. On the other hand, the presence of formal voice mechanisms reflects a proactive attitude to the management of voice

by organisations through the intentional creation of channels to highlight management receptiveness to certain types of information (Klaas et al., 2012). However, empirical evidence into the difference that formal and informal communication channels has made to an individuals' propensity to voice is scarce.

Ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems and opinions. The development of the voice and silence literature has largely taken place based on an assumption that a subordinate's willingness to voice was not affected by the type of information that they wanted to voice (Morrison, 2011). In a recent review of the literature, Morrison (2011) argued that it is no longer acceptable for scholars to treat all types of information as valence neutral in the light of growing evidence to suggest that an individual's propensity to voice is shaped by the type of information they are passing. She therefore recommended that research focus on three types of voice; suggestion-focused voice (the communication of suggestions or ideas for how to improve the work unit or organisation), problem-focused voice (a subordinate's expression of concern about work practices, incidents or behaviours that he or she regards as harmful, or potentially harmful to the organisation), and opinion-focused voice (communicating a point of view that is different to that of others).

Opinion-focused voice can be considered to be one of the most valuable forms of voice because it provides superiors with additional perspectives (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) allowing them to make better decisions (Dundon et al., 2004). Furthermore, the lack of opinion-focused voice is considered extremely disadvantageous, with large organisation disasters such as the collapse of Enron (Tourish & Vatcha, 2005) and the NASA space shuttle Columbia crash (Starbuck & Farjoun, 2005) attributed to an inability for subordinates to challenge decisions and practices. Despite its importance, upward challenge is one of the most difficult forms of voice for subordinates to deliver. For example, Milliken et al., (2003) carried out interviews with 40 full-time subordinates who were undertaking a part-time MBA

at a large urban university in the US to find out what types of things they would be most likely to withhold from their superior. In a similar study, Brinsfield (2013) carried out a web-based survey asking a combination of students with work experience and employed individuals to talk about the nature of situations when they remained quiet in the workplace. Both studies identified that amongst the top five most difficult things to talk about were challenging a supervisor's performance, discussing problems concerning organisational processes and procedures, and disagreement or concerns with company policies or decisions, all of which can be considered to be a matter of opinion. As a result of the importance of the opinion-focused voice, one form of this, upward challenge, was chosen for the present study.

Upward Challenge. From a managerial perspective, upward challenge can act as a useful "litmus test" to understand the success of organisational change efforts (Kassing & Kava, 2013 p.54). For example, if there is a spike in upward challenge, it could indicate that something is being poorly managed and subordinates are unhappy. However, Tourish and Robson (2006) cautioned against assuming that a lack of upward challenge meant that everything was ok when it could in fact represent that subordinates are having difficulty in challenging upwards because of resistance from superiors to hearing it or organisational processes which make it difficult for subordinates to challenge upwards.

From an organisational perspective, upward challenge can also contribute towards organisation learning. Organisational learning can be defined as "a macro-level construct that refers to the way in which organisational decision makers interpret (or fail to interpret) their environments and adapt (or not) accordingly" (Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelley, 2012 p.137). Bisel and colleagues (2012) argued that the opposite of organisational learning could be viewed as organisational ignorance, a state which prevented superiors from having information on which to base their decisions.

Where a subordinate expresses a different opinion to that of a superior, it is possible that superiors will consider this to be a challenge, particularly in organisations where there is a strong culture of top-down management (Tourish & Robson, 2006). A top-down culture works on the premise that subordinates will carry out the instructions of the superiors in order to accomplish organisational goals. In situations where subordinates disagree, superiors may feel threatened by the difference of opinion because they fear that it may prevent their instructions from being carried out (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Upward challenge is likely to be triggered by a managerial or organisational decision which leads to feelings of dissatisfaction within the subordinate. Therefore, challenge in the present study has been defined as the expression of disagreement with an organisational or a managerial decision for the purpose of having the decision changed. The upward nature of challenge reflects the direction of the challenge, indicating that the challenge must take place upwards, in other words, from a subordinate to their superior.

Despite the fact that the voice and silence literature considers voice to be a challenge to the status quo (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Van Dyne et al., 2003) the literature has seldom considered the concept of upward challenge directly and hence, there is little literature which can be used to directly inform the present study. However, a number of different forms of voice which could be considered similar or related to upward challenge have been discussed in the literature. Therefore, it has been necessary in the present study to draw from related types of voice which have been more often studied in order to understand how upward challenge might be shaped by perceived formality. These include dissent (Kassing, 1998) and Critical Upward Communication (Tourish & Robson, 2003, 2006). Brief descriptions of each type of voice have been given below.

Dissent can be defined as expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions “directly to supervisors and management” (Kassing, 2009 p.420). There are three directions in which

subordinates could voice; upward to superiors, known as articulated dissent; to peers, known as lateral dissent; and to friends and family members outside of the organisation known as displaced dissent (Kassing, 1998). Kassing and Kava (2013) argued that where dissent took place either laterally or externally, an opportunity for the organisation to learn about problems or identify improvements had been wasted.

Critical Upward Communication (CUC) has been defined as “feedback that is critical of organizational goals and management behaviour and which is transmitted by those without managerial power to those with such power” (Tourish & Robson, 2006 p.711). It is possible to see from this definition that there are two key aspects of CUC which are considered to be important. Firstly, that CUC acts as feedback to the superiors to keep them informed of what subordinates think of the organisation they work in, the processes they are following and the decisions that are being made. Critical feedback is considered to be feedback that indicates to superiors that subordinates do not agree with the decisions that are being made. Secondly, that a subordinate’s propensity to share CUC is likely to be shaped by the power differences that exist between subordinates and their superiors. The power differentials that exist between a subordinate and their superior are thought to cause subordinates to act in ways that present themselves in the best light possible, in order to reduce the risk of challenge. The act of presenting oneself in a favourable light is known as impression management (Goffman, 1959). Where subordinates agree with superiors as a way of reducing the risk of upsetting the superior or rocking the boat, this is known as ingratiation (Tourish, 2005). Within the field of dissent and CUC, impression management is thought to account for many of the voice behaviours of subordinates.

Persons who might be able to take appropriate action. A study by Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) found that voice was most successful when it was directed at the

formal superior of the unit. This was because they had the power and authority to take action when told about ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems and opinions.

With the intent to bring about improvement or change. The fact that voice is considered to have the intention to bring about improvement or change highlights an assumption that voice can be considered to be prosocial in nature. Prosocial voice is “based on cooperative motives.... Its primary focus is to benefit others, such as the organisation” (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003 p.1371). Therefore, voice can be perceived of as a constructive attempt to improve the existing situation. However, there are also other motivations which offer alternative explanations for why people voice; acquiescent voice and defensive voice (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Acquiescent voice has been defined as “the verbal expression of work-related ideas, information, or opinions – based on feelings of resignation.” (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003 p.1373). This refers to situations where a subordinate feels unable to make a difference and therefore agrees with opinions or courses of action for the only reason that they don’t feel that voicing their opinion will make a difference. The best example of acquiescent voice is that of the Abilene Paradox, a phenomenon that describes a situation where individuals go along with something that they don’t want to do because they feel that speaking up won’t make a difference (Harvey, 1974). In the Abilene Paradox, a group of friends decide to go for a day trip to a place called Abilene, a 53-mile journey on a hot day in a car without air conditioning. On returning from a day out, it became apparent through discussions that no-one had wanted to go but each had thought the other did. The outcome was a wasted journey to a place that no-one had wanted to go, nor enjoyed when they got there. When using this example in an organisational setting, it is possible to see that if no-one feels able to share their opinion about what they want to do or don’t want to do, it is very easy for decisions to be made which remain unchallenged, even though everyone believes them to be wrong.

Defensive voice has been defined as “expressing work-related ideas, information or opinions – based on fear – with the goal of protecting the self” (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003 p.1372). Defensive voice therefore represents situations where subordinates speak up in an attempt to protect themselves, or to blame others and direct attention away from themselves. One example of where defensive voice is likely to be observed is when individuals feel that their integrity is being threatened and therefore decide to speak up in order to protect their reputation (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007).

Section 2.2 has attempted to define voice by highlighting some of the key themes in the literature which have been shown to shape propensity to voice. These include the content of the message, the person to whom the voice is being addressed, and the underlying motivation for the voice. That voice is informal in nature has been identified as an assumption that underpins the literature yet the assumption requires further clarification and definition before its influence over voice can be understood.

2.3 Defining Silence

Pinder and Harlos (2001) were the first to offer a definition of employee silence. They defined silence as “the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress” (p.334). The recognition of silence as a phenomenon provided a turning point in the development of the voice and silence literature. Prior to this, a lack of voice had been seen as inactive endorsement, that is remaining silent was viewed as agreement. Silence has also been defined as “the conscious withholding of information, suggestions, ideas, questions or concerns about potentially important work or organisational related issues from persons who might be able to take action to address those issues” (Morrison, 2011 p. 377). As noted in the definition, silence is considered to be a conscious and intentional act. This would suggest

that a subordinate makes a cognitive appraisal on receipt of information which results in the individual deciding to remain silent rather than voice.

The silence literature has traditionally been explored from two perspectives: organisational silence and employee silence. Organisational silence has focused on the characteristics of the senior management team, the organisational structure and organisational context that led to subordinates making a decision to withhold information. In contrast, employee silence has focused on the influences that shape an individual's propensity to remain quiet. Both forms of silence have been described below in more detail.

Organisational Silence

Organisational silence has been defined as “a collective-level phenomenon of saying or doing very little in response to significant problems that face an organisation” (Henriksen & Dayton, 2006 p.1539). Morrison and Milliken (2000) provided an illustration of organisational silence using the story of the Emperor's New Clothes. This story describes a situation where a King has been told by two swindlers posing as tailors that his new suit is invisible to stupid people, but in effect they haven't given him a suit and he is wearing nothing at all. When he goes out into town, no-one dares to tell him he has no clothes on, all agreeing what a wonderful new suit he has on. Finally, a child, unfamiliar with the social etiquette, tells him he has no clothes on. Despite the fact that others then joined in, telling the King he had no clothes on, he carried on regardless. Morrison and Milliken (2000) likened subordinates to those onlookers who didn't dare to tell the King that he had no clothes on at all and suggested that subordinates do know the truth about issues and problems but that they don't dare to speak up. Morrison and Milliken (2000) concluded that an organisation's overall levels of voice and silence could be determined by the type of voice climate that superiors created. For example, where superiors were unreceptive to voice and dismissive of

subordinate concerns it was unlikely that subordinates would attempt to voice, knowing that their voice would be unwelcome. The concept of organisational silence has helped to highlight the importance of organisational context. The context can refer to the environmental conditions (Hirschman, 1970), the organisation structure and design (Jablin, 1982) or the organisational climate (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Furthermore, the implications of collective silence include the stunted growth of the organisation caused by an inability for the organisation to capture learnings (Argyris, 1977).

Another explanation for levels of collective silence in organisations is a theory about spirals of silence. A spiral of silence can be said to exist when one person withholds information which may be contrary to an opinion already stated by someone else, but the withholding of information allows the false creation of majority opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). In other words, failure to speak up allowed others to think that a more voiced opinion was more popular. At an individual level, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) identified how the inability of homosexuals to disclose their sexual identity in the workplace led them to withhold other information, highlight the exacerbating effect of being unable to disclose their full identity, leading to them withdrawing in other areas. They went on to explain how this individual effect could lead to a more collective silence, known as contagion. When one person is unable to talk about their full identity in the workplace they are not able to build trusting relationships with others which leads to silence about a range of other issues as well.

There has been very little empirical exploration of organisational factors that shape voice and silence. However, Vakola and Bouradas (2005) carried out a study in one organisation about to undergo a merger. Six hundred and seventy-seven members of an organisation, not specified by hierarchical level, filled out a questionnaire during a group activity. The results showed that there was a positive correlation between the attitude of senior management to silence and communication opportunities available within the

organisation. In other words, the more superiors were in favour of voice, the more communication opportunities were made available within the organisation. They also found a positive correlation between voice and communication opportunities, highlighting that if communication opportunities were available, subordinates were more likely to voice their concerns. However, communication opportunities referred to general approachability and openness of the superior rather than specific channels of communication. There is a belief that in any organisation, the culture is created by the original founders and then the organisation attracts like-minded people who continue to embed this culture further (Detert & Burris, 2007). Therefore, silence could be said to be created and strengthened by management through all levels of the organisation.

Employee Silence

As well as a focus on the role of the organisation, a number of influences that shape why individuals may not speak up have also been identified.

Motivation. Motivation has been defined as “a set of energetic forces that originates both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behaviour, and to determine its form, direction, intensity and duration” (Pinder, 1998 as cited in Brinsfield, 2013). A number of forms of motivation have been identified as potential reasons why individuals may not speak up.

In the same way as for understanding voice, a theoretical model, presented by Pinder and Harlos (2001), identified two forms of silence, acquiescence and quiescence, and offered explanations about why individuals may keep quiet when faced with perceived injustice. They defined quiescence as “disagreement with one's circumstances, in effect suffering in silence while being aware of existing alternatives to change the status quo, yet unwilling to explore them” (p.348). This definition suggests that through fear of speaking up, individuals

become resigned to their situation and are reluctant to raise any issues to management. However, Pinder and Harlos (2001) highlighted that given support for their concerns, subordinates could be encouraged to speak up alongside others. On the other hand, Pinder and Harlos (2001) identified acquiescence as a deeper form of silence “a taking for granted of the situation and limited awareness that alternatives exist” (p.349), meaning that individuals might be unlikely to ever speak up. Their particular focus on silence was to explore why individuals who felt they had been mistreated failed to speak up to their superiors. Their theoretical model was based on a number of qualitative interviews with individuals who had experienced sexual harassment in the Canadian military. What they argued was that individuals do not speak up because they don’t know if anyone will support their ideas. This is what they called quiescence. Despite the fact that with encouragement subordinates might be likely to speak up, over time, if that support isn’t offered, the possibility of speaking up reduces. When individuals get to the stage where they will never speak up, they called this acquiescence. In this case, a deep resignation that the mistreatment cannot be addressed and therefore the individual no longer considers any other option than just keeping quiet and moving on. Acquiescent silence has also been referred to as futility (Detert & Treviño, 2010).

Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003) built on work by Pinder and Harlos (2001) and argued that motives could be either passive or proactive. By viewing the motivations in this way, they highlighted a further type of silence, defensive silence. They defined defensive silence as “withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions as a form of self- protection, based on fear” (p.1367). This was similar to Pinder and Harlos (2001) definition of quiescence but defensive silence was seen as being a proactive behaviour, designed to avoid the risks associated with speaking up. Based on their distinction between passive and proactive behaviour, they also created a new form of silence which they called prosocial silence. They defined this as “withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with

the goal of benefiting other people or the organisation – based on altruism or cooperative motives” (p.1368).

Individual Differences. Studies have also shown that individuals may also remain silent because of individual differences. Van Dyne and LePine (2001) identified that personality factors were related to silence. They carried out a lab experiment to understand the nature of different personality types and how this affected voice behaviour. They focused on the difference between *task performance*, described as behaviours which “directly contribute to or support the transformation of inputs into outputs” (p.327) and *contextual performance* described as behaviour which “contributes indirectly to organisational success by maintaining or improving the “organizational, social or psychological environment necessary for the technical core to function effectively and efficiently”” (Motowidlo et al., 1997, as cited in Van Dyne and LePine 2001, p.327). Task performance is known as in-role behaviour (Katz & Kahn, 1978). They found that Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Agreeableness related more to contextual performance than they do to task behaviour and cognitive ability related more to task performance than voice behaviour.

Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) carried out a survey to investigate how two individual factors, self-monitoring and self-esteem and two contextual factors, top-management openness and trust in superior affected voice behaviour. They found that low self-monitors speak up more in the face of increasing management openness, internal locus of control, self-esteem and trust in superior. For high self-monitors, as locus of control increased, speaking up decreased.

Despite the fact that emotion has long been recognised as being a contributing factor to silence, its relationship to voice has been a more recent development. Grant (2013) focused on the role of emotion and how this determined outcomes of voice. He found that

people who can voice about problems at work in an emotionally regulated way are believed to be better performers by their superiors. He also found that in particular, emotion regulation was more important when providing challenging information rather than providing information which was felt to be non-challenging. He also found that people with good emotion regulation spoke up more regularly and in a more timely manner which derived better outcomes; for example, waiting until the superior was in a good mood. This highlights that emotion is important in influencing voice behaviour and that challenging situations invoke emotions which may prevent people from speaking up or doing it in a constructive way.

One key theme which appears to run throughout much of the voice and silence literature is that voice to a superior is considered to be risky and therefore, voice or silence can be considered to be underpinned by fear. Despite the fact that the superior is the most important person to whom voice can be delivered, the superior is also the individual from whom most subordinates are likely to withhold voice. Studies have shown that between 66% and 85% of participants reported remaining silent rather than voice to their superior (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003).

Milliken and colleagues (2003) carried out interviews with 40 full-time subordinates in a range of industries, all part-time students on an MBA to investigate the types of things that people are reluctant to speak up about and why. The participants were asked whether they felt comfortable speaking to their boss or another more senior person about problems or issues that concerned them in their current organisation. The authors found that subordinates had many fears including fear of being labelled or viewed negatively either as a troublemaker, complainer or a tell-tale, fear of damaging a relationship and fear of losing their job or ruining promotion opportunities. A lesser cited reason for remaining silent was a

poor or distant relationship with superior although this didn't receive any further attention in the literature.

Another reason why subordinates withhold information from a superior is thought to be deep-seated beliefs about what is appropriate behaviour when speaking up to a superior. Detert and Edmondson (2011) found that the voice behaviour of individuals working in a hierarchical organisation, regardless of gender or level within the organisation was shaped by five Implicit Voice Theories (IVT). The first IVT was that superiors heard suggestions as personal criticism. Subordinates felt that challenging or disagreeing with a decision or course of action could be detrimental because the superior would take the difference in opinion as a personal attack on their ability to do their job. The second IVT was that subordinates must speak up only with solid data, polished ideas, and complete solutions. This theory was driven by the need to be able to provide answers for the rigorous questioning that takes place when a superior is presented with information that challenges their perception. Tourish and Robson (2003) found that superiors tended only to question negative information, and that positive information and good news stories were accepted readily. The third IVT was don't bypass the boss upward by challenging or disagreeing with them in front of their superiors. Subordinates believed that doing so would be viewed as disloyal and unacceptable. The fourth IVT was don't embarrass the boss in public. Bosses don't like to be given negative information without advance, private notice. Subordinates felt that this was a risky behaviour and resulted in subordinates remaining silent or waiting for a better opportunity. The fifth IVT was that speaking up in ways that fulfilled any of the previous IVTs would result in negative career consequences.

These IVTs were developed across four studies. For study one, they interviewed 190 subordinates from different levels and different parts of a US-wide technology

organisation and conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. IVTs represent mental models which explain how individuals perceive rules about speaking up. These rules are used to decide when to speak up and when to remain silent. In order to test the generalisability of the IVTs outside of one organisation, for the second study they developed a survey which they sent to a number of part-time students enrolled in an executive education course to see if the themes were recognisable in other organisations. Despite using a different sample, the same five IVTs were identified. Study three was aimed at developing the psychometric properties of the themes so testing could take place on a larger scale. Once again, they used a different sample and found that the five IVTs were separate constructs and that they were originally formed outside of the workplace rather than being influenced by organisational context or managerial status, gender or tenure. The final study was a number of questionnaires distributed to employed executive MBA students on a number of different occasions to test if IVTs were able to predict voice behaviour in an organisational context. They found that the organisational context did not shape voice or silence, suggesting that IVTs were not founded on evidence, but that they were a set of beliefs that remained salient, even though an individual might never have observed or experienced the result that they feared the most in their workplace. This led the authors to conclude that the beliefs are mostly self-protective and driven through fear, further underlining the notion that fear is a large driver of voice and silence behaviour.

This section has highlighted that voicing to a superior can be considered to be risky through fear of negative repercussions including reduced promotion chances or career progression opportunities, being labelled a troublemaker and damage to relationships. Perceptions of risk were likely to be shaped by the extent to which a

subordinate knew a superior and the perceived formality of the setting in which voice took place.

2.4 Are Voice and Silence Different Constructs or Part of the Same Continuum?

One consideration when understanding the importance of the factors that shape voice and silence is whether voice and silence are opposites of the same construct or if they are actually separate constructs altogether (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009; Schlosser & Zolin, 2012; Van Dyne et al., 2003). If they belong to the same construct it is possible to say that what discourages voice, encourages silence and vice versa. If voice and silence belong to the same construct, it assumes that there is a finite amount of voice or silence that is possible, and therefore where voice takes place, silence must be less, and vice versa. On the other hand, if voice and silence are separate constructs, the things that encourage voice do not necessarily discourage silence. Morrison (2011) argued that where voice and silence are assumed to be conscious decisions, voice and silence can be considered opposites of the same continuum. Hence, if an individual makes a decision to speak, silence will be less and vice versa. This is based on the premise that an individual must make a conscious decision to do one or the other, they can't do both at the same time. When considering voice and silence as opposites of the same continuum, it is possible to use studies that have identified factors that encourage voice and apply them to reduce silence, or factors that discourage silence and use them to encourage voice. Therefore, combining the voice and silence literatures has the potential to provide a wider view of the reasons for, and outcomes associated with voice and silence (Mowbray et al., 2014).

From a different perspective, Kish-Gephart and colleagues (2009) argued that voice and silence were different constructs because although voice was the result of a conscious decision to speak up, silence could be an automatic and unconscious response to fear,

suggesting that voice and silence were not necessarily driven by the presence or absence of the same motives. In this case, it is necessary to interpret findings with caution rather than accept that voice and silence are opposites. The fact that silence may be the result of an unconscious decision suggests that silence may be challenging to study because individuals are unlikely to be unable to explain why they remained silent.

Another consideration posed by a question over whether voice and silence are opposite ends of the same construct or different constructs is to consider whether voice and silence can occur simultaneously. For example, can an individual speak up and be quiet at the same time? The literature on information distortion has focused on understanding how much information and of what type is passed to superiors. Studies have shown that individuals can be seen to exaggerate, under-sell or omit information when passing it on to others (e.g., Gaines, 1980). Secondly, there is a recognition that individuals can be quiet about some issues while speaking up about others (e.g. Bowen & Blackmon, 2003).

Summary

This chapter has provided definitions of voice and silence and identified upward challenge as a worthy area of consideration. Two main influences over upward challenge were identified, individual and organisational. The next chapter will turn to the concept of formality and provide a literature review of the importance of formality on upward challenge.

Chapter Three The Role of Formality in Voice and Silence Research

The previous chapter provided definitions of voice and silence, an overview of the factors that are believed to shape voice and silence within organisations and highlighted the importance of studying one form of voice in particular, upward challenge. The role of formality can be identified as an important area of consideration because it is the superior from whom people most withhold voice, and the superior represents a formal role in the organisation. In addition, two possible areas where formality might shape upward challenge can be identified: relationship with superior and communication channel. This section will present an overview of the definitions of formality as well as consider how formality is likely to shape upward challenge.

3.1 Defining Formality

Formality is often positioned as the opposite of informality, causing organisations to be represented as dichotomous, comprising two separate entities, the formal organisation and the informal organisation. However, formality can be viewed as a more transparent and communicable form of informal organisational life, therefore suggesting that formal and informal are not opposites, but different forms of the same thing (Stinchcombe, 2001).

Formality can have different meanings and it can be perceived as being both negative and positive for organisations. The use of dictionary definitions can provide important insights into how practitioners may perceive certain terms. For example, the concept of formality is synonymous with official procedure (The Free Dictionary, 2016). Formality can therefore be advantageous for organisations because it provides structure to social organisational activities, meaning that processes can be standardised and expedited in order to achieve organisational goals and governance processes can be put in place to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Therefore, despite the sometimes inflexible nature of procedures,

formality can represent an enabler of action owing to its previously tested methods of achieving organisational goals (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2016). Formality has also been defined as the customary and rigid observance of etiquette and the strict observance of social conventions (Roget's Thesaurus, 2016). For example, showing respect to more senior colleagues or providing offices to superiors to represent their higher status.

Formality can also help to ensure that managerial decisions are implemented. Formality enables implementation by providing organisations with a hierarchical structure through which decisions can be made by superiors with different levels of power in order to ensure that the actions are appropriate for each level of the organisation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Hierarchies are based on the unequal distribution of power so that decisions made at senior levels can be provided as direction for those lower down the organisation (Jablin, 1979). However, subordinates do not always agree with decisions that have been made about courses of action. In these situations, upward challenge may occur but the power imbalance makes it difficult for voices to be heard (Tourish & Robson, 2006).

From a negative perspective, formality is often associated with activities which no longer serve the purpose they were designed for (Stinchcombe, 2001). As a result, formality can sometimes be used to describe a course of action for which no-one understands the real purpose (Google Dictionary, 2016). This can lead to perceptions that formality is problematic and unnecessary. For example, the original intention of giving separate offices to superiors was to acknowledge their higher status and distinguish them from the less senior members of their team. However, providing offices for senior members of staff is now considered to be unhelpful because superiors become distant from their teams which prevents them from managing effectively (Davis, 1984).

This section has demonstrated that formality can be perceived as both positive and negative. The next section will now consider how a formal relationship with superior might shape upward challenge.

3.1.1. Defining Formal Relationship with Superior

Chapter Two demonstrated that the superior represented a formal role in the organisation and the superior was the person from whom subordinates most withheld voice owing to their ability to impose sanctions. The formal nature of the superior is therefore likely to suggest that upward challenge is likely to be perceived as risky. However, it is possible to have an informal relationship with a superior and this has been shown to increase propensity to voice. Therefore, it is important to understand how a subordinate can tell if they feel that the relationship they have with their superior is formal or informal and what it is about the nature of the relationship with the superior that the subordinates might perceive as formal. Two areas of the literature can provide an insight into the reasons that the relationship with superior could shape upward challenge; power and relationship quality.

Power. When studying voice and silence within an organisation, unless studying the smallest of organisations, it is impossible to avoid the concept of power which is symbiotic with organisational structure. It has been argued that power is likely to be the most fundamental driver of voice and silence (Morrison & Rothman, 2009). Power can be defined as “the ability to influence others” (Morrison & Rothman, 2009 p.115) and therefore highlights that “power exists only in relation to others whereby low-power parties depend on high-power parties to obtain rewards and avoid punishments” (Anderson & Brion, 2014 p.69). Within a hierarchical organisation, this means that superiors are able to use their power to promise rewards or threaten punishments, making them an influential figure over voice and silence.

Despite the fact that the voice and silence literature acknowledges that the power differentials within organisations are likely to shape voice and silence (Edmondson, 2003), there has been very little empirical research to show what it is about power specifically that causes subordinates to voice or be silent. Where there has been empirical research, it is mostly experimental and so the results must be applied with caution when using them to predict what might happen in the workplace. For example, Tost, Gino and Larrick (2013) explored the effects of formal power on leader behaviour. They defined power as “an individual’s relative ability to control others’ outcomes, experiences, or behaviors” (p.1466). They were particularly interested in the effects of hierarchy and its ability to allow subordinates to feel power (either powerful or powerless) and the effects that this had on voice. They carried out three studies with students and staff in lab experiments comprising a simulation of a mountain expedition on Everest, a murder mystery and a work-based exercise. In each situation, participants acted as either leaders or followers. Tost and colleagues (2013) found that the leaders who felt more powerful than their subordinates (measured by asking them how much power they felt on a Likert scale) were more likely to verbally dominate them, resulting in subordinates speaking up less because they had less opportunity. The outcomes of the studies showed that less voice led to reduced team performance (measured by whether the team reached the right answer or not). The verbal domination also led to those acting as followers rating those acting as leaders as being less open and providing less opportunities for communication. The authors concluded that leaders who feel powerful are more likely to have teams that perform less well because they are verbally dominated.

As a result of the unequal distribution of power that hierarchies promote, superiors and subordinates might experience feelings of distance from each other. Two types of

distance are said to be created by the power differences within an organisation: power distance and social distance (Anderson & Brion, 2014).

Power Distance. Power distance can be defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005 p.46). This means that in some societies, there is an acceptance that some people have more power than others. In other societies, there is less acceptance of the power differences and a striving for more equality in society. Power distance can be measured in one of two ways and is usually represented on a scale of low to high. One way is using the national power distance index. The index was created to provide an indicator of the amount of inequality that existed in a country’s society (Hofstede, 1983). Hofstede found that the way people had been educated led to them interpret things in different ways. By comparing 116,000 questionnaires from subordinates across different countries, he found that there was a link between the country where subordinates lived and the way they made sense of events. He concluded that countries where there was much inequality in society could be said to have a high power distance and societies where there is less inequality can be said to have lower power distance. Perceptions of power distance are largely concerned with the extent to which superiors consult subordinates about matters that may concern them and the extent to which it is acceptable for subordinates to express disagreement if they are dissatisfied with decisions made by the superior. Therefore, in a high power distance culture, subordinates will expect to be given more orders and asked for their opinion less, if at all.

Where high power distance exists, people lower in the organisation are more likely to pay deference to those more senior and therefore, superiors will tend to run organisations more autocratically. In countries with a low score on the national power distance index, such as the USA and the UK, although superiors might be happy to

include subordinates in decision-making, it is still recognised that the superior owns the decision and has the final say (Hofstede, 1983). As a result, cultures where high power distance is the norm are likely to be characterised by a lower propensity to voice because subordinates will not consider it their place to voice nor will they expect their superior to be receptive to their views. This has been confirmed by Huang and colleagues (2005) who found that there was a strong correlation between high power distance and withholding of opinions in a sample of 136,018 respondents spanning 421 organisations, across 24 countries. They used the national power distance index (Hofstede, 1991 as cited in Huang, Vliert, & Vegt, 2005) as a measure of power distance for each country. To measure voice, which was represented as subordinate opinion withholding, subordinates were asked 21 questions about their current workplace. For example, “How do you rate your last performance appraisal on ... helping you improve your job performance?” (p.467). The answers were captured on a six point Likert scale where option six was “no opinion”. Opinion withholding was said to have taken place where individuals chose option six. The study found that subordinates were more likely to answer “no opinion” in countries assigned a high power distance score. However, this study was a survey where the questions were not about subordinate views of organisational or managerial decisions and the national power distance index was used which did not reflect individual differences in perception of power distance. Furthermore, the study was not about upward challenge.

Criticisms of low reliability associated with the Hofstede scale for indicating levels of power distance have been identified. For example, when compared with a similar exercise 30 years later, it was found that cultural values had changed within the society, suggesting that the original scales were no longer representative (Wu, 2006). A more reliable method of measuring power distance is thought to be a method that captures

individual views on power distance because societies are made up of people from a range of cultural backgrounds (Dorfman & Howell, 1988 as cited in Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). Example items from the scale include “superiors make most decisions without consulting subordinates” and “subordinates should not disagree with management decisions”. Nevertheless, a study by Landau (2009) found a similar negative link between power distance and voice which was measured using a scale for upward dissent.

Landau (2009) asked a number of students with part-time jobs and a sample of their friends and co-workers to fill in a survey that measured their individual perceptions of power distance and propensity to voice. Two hundred and twenty-five respondents, the majority from private sector organisations in the US, responded. Power distance was measured using three items developed by Yoo and Donthu (2002). Example items included “people in lower positions should not disagree with people in higher positions” and “people in higher positions should not ask opinions of people in lower positions” (Landau, 2009 p.43). Propensity to voice was measured by using a shortened version of the Organisational Dissent Scale (Kassing, 2000). Example items included “I am hesitant to raise questions or contradictory opinions in my organisation” and “I don’t tell my supervisor when I disagree with workplace decisions” (Landau, 2009 p.43). The results indicated that voice was negatively related to high power distance, confirming the results of previous studies that had examined power distance and voice. Furthermore, Landau (2009) provided support for the notion that power distance is negatively related to upward dissent, suggesting that perceptions of formality, where subordinates perceive high power distance between themselves and their superiors, could reduce levels of upward challenge. These studies would suggest that individuals are aware of the power differentials that exist between themselves and their superior and this prevents them from challenging upwards. However, what is not clear is how subordinates are reminded that superiors are more powerful.

There has been very little empirical exploration to understand power distance from a qualitative perspective.

Social Distance. Power differences between subordinates and superiors have also been found to lead to another form of distance, social distance. It is believed that power “induces a mind-set in which people feel less close to others and experience a general preference to do things alone” (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012 p.282). Therefore, social distance can describe the extent to which a subordinate feels close to their superior and wishes to build a relationship with them. Over the course of five experiments using students who played a number of computer games, Lammers and colleagues gathered empirical evidence to show that individuals with feelings of legitimate power were likely to feel more distant from those without legitimate power. When used in an organisational sense, legitimate power is used to describe the power enjoyed by individuals because of their position within the organisation (Raven, 1993), indicating that more senior people have more power because of their position within the hierarchy.

When subordinates and superiors feel distant from each other, it is possible that they would describe their relationship as formal because they will be conscious of their formal positions within the organisation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The subordinates will realise that they are more junior than their superior and therefore have less legitimate power. Similarly, the superiors will be aware of their formal senior role and that they have more legitimate power. The literature has shown that where superiors perceive themselves to be high power or socially distant from their subordinates, they are less likely to invite feedback from direct reports (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Therefore, it could be said that power and social distance shapes voice and silence by creating situations which reduce the opportunity for subordinates and their superiors to build personal relationships.

Relationship Quality. Relationship quality has been found to be linked to voice behaviour. Relationship quality has been much studied in the leadership literature using Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). The relationship that a subordinate can have with a superior can be described as high, medium or low, with a low quality relationship being described as a formal one (Mowbray et al., 2014). A low quality relationship is one characterised by poor levels of mutual trust, obligation and respect. On the other hand, a high quality relationship is characterised by superiors and subordinates who have strong levels of trust and respect for each other and therefore feel obligated to support each other.

LMX suggests that subordinates can have a relationship with their superior, which starts off as low quality because the subordinate and the superior don't know each other, and can develop over time to a high quality relationship where the two know each other better (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The development of the relationship between subordinate and superior can be illustrated using the lifecycle model of LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991). According to the lifecycle model of LMX theory, the relationship between subordinate and superior develops over three phases. The initial phase is the stranger phase when a subordinate and a superior have only recently started working together. The relationship is characterised by the subordinate carrying out only in-role behaviours in order to fulfil their contractual obligations. It can therefore be said that the subordinate is working in their own self-interest, rather than out of any commitment to the superior or the organisation. The information exchanges will be mainly work-related concerning routine matters and are unlikely to involve any exchange of personal or social information.

The second phase is the acquaintance phase, where subordinates and superiors start to share more information with each other, including social and non-work related matters. During this phase, the superior tests if the subordinate would like to take on more

responsibility beyond their contractual obligations, and be involved with helping to make managerial decisions. If the subordinate does not wish to take on more tasks, the relationship is unlikely to move beyond the acquaintance phase. However, if the relationship reaches this point, it is likely that the subordinate has demonstrated commitment to the superior and organisation rather than pure self-interest, which then assumes progression of the relationship to the next phase.

The final phase is the mature partnership phase. This type of relationship is characterised by subordinates and superiors, embarking on decisions and courses of action together, feeling part of the same team, with joint goals and aspirations. Subordinates will have demonstrated great commitment to the organisation and in return, the superior will help the subordinate develop by supporting them in terms of promotion and self-development opportunities. The information exchange will be both work and personal with the emphasis on building a personal relationship that extends beyond work purposes. Each of these phases, stranger, acquaintance and mature can also be referred to as low, medium or high quality respectively.

Measurement of LMX is typically done using one of a number of scales that have been developed, although the LMX7 scale developed by Graen, Novak and Sommerkamp (1982) is the most frequently used. Furthermore, LMX7 has been found to have the “soundest psychometric properties of all instruments” (Gerstner & Day, 1997 p.827). The fact it is short and possessing high levels of validity possibly explaining one of the reasons why it is favoured by scholars. Sample items include “I can count on my supervisor to “bail me out” at his or her expense when I really need it” and “I usually know where I stand with my superior” (Jian, Shi, & Dalisay, 2014).

LMX is based on the premise that superiors have different quality relationships with their subordinates, meaning that some subordinates enjoy a high quality, close relationship with their superior, whereas others enjoy a low quality, more distant relationship with their superior (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). The advantages of focusing on the relationship between the two is the acceptance that voice outcomes are the result of both leaders and followers. From a voice and silence perspective, this allows the possibility to emerge that voice behaviour is likely to be different for each combination of superior and subordinate, something which has received scant acknowledgement to date, despite differences in relationships between subordinates and their superior being a core feature of the LMX literature. This throws into question the use of many of the large scale, quantitative studies which have assumed that voice can be predicted.

Another measure of relationship quality is the extent to which subordinates would describe their superior as open, referred to as managerial openness. Managerial openness has been found to be positively linked to voice (Detert & Burris, 2007). They used 3,153 survey responses from non-managerial staff within a US restaurant chain, asking them to rate their superior on how open they were to suggestions, and the respondent's propensity to voice. Managerial openness was defined as "subordinates' perceptions that their boss listens to them, is interested in their ideas, gives fair consideration to the ideas presented, and at least sometimes takes action to address the matter raised" (p.871). However, the study was only concerned with prosocial voice, that is suggestions and ideas for improvement, and not with voice that might be considered to challenge the views of a superior.

3.1.2 How Does Perceived Formality Of Relationship With Superior Shape Upward Challenge?

The section above identified that a formal relationship with superior is one which is characterised by awareness of power differentials and a new or poor quality relationship. In

order to understand how formal relationship with superior is likely to shape upward challenge, a number of studies can provide some insight.

The direction in which a subordinate dissents has been found to be predominantly related to the relationship with superior. For example, Kassing (2000) found that those with a stronger relationship with superior as measured by LMX were more likely to dissent to a superior than those with low LMX. Two hundred and thirty-two subordinates who worked for a range of public and private sector organisations in the US were asked to indicate the nature of the relationship that they had with their superior, measured using LMX7 (Scandura & Graen, 1984 as cited in Kassing, 2000), and how they expressed their disagreement and contradictory opinions about work to a superior or to a colleague, measured using a shorter form of the Organisational Dissent Scale (Kassing, 2000). The results showed that those with high LMX reported significantly more use of articulated dissent than those with low LMX, and those with low LMX reported significantly more use of latent dissent than those with high LMX. Kassing (2000) therefore concluded that subordinates were more likely to remain silent to superiors where low LMX existed because they viewed the channels to a superior as “blocked” (p.66).

On the other hand, Turnage and Goodboy (2016) found that people with low LMX were more likely to dissent through email. One hundred and sixty-six part and full-time subordinates from a range of US organisations (details not provided) responded to a survey asking them to indicate the level of their relationship quality with their superior, measured using LMX7 and a modified version of the Organisational Dissent Scale (Kassing, 1998) which asked respondents to indicate whether they dissented upwards or laterally either face to face or using email. The study by Turnage and Goodboy (2016) added more understanding to the previous finding that low LMX led to less upward dissent suggesting that low LMX might lead to less face to face dissent only, rather than reduced levels of dissent in total.

Turnage and Goodboy (2016) also found that those in the middle group were less likely to dissent than either those with high or low LMX using either face to face or email. They suggested that this could be because the middle group do not enjoy the privilege of high LMX by being able to say things without fear of retribution, or the “nothing to lose” approach that low LMX might have. However, it is not clear if the middle group dissent less overall, or whether there is another means of dissenting which has not been captured as this study covered only email or face to face. When carrying out qualitative research, it will be almost impossible to know who middle group participants are, making these results difficult to use to interpret interview data.

This chapter has shown that a formal relationship with superior can be defined in a number of ways. Most of the studies that have focused on relationship quality and voice have used quantitative measures, with a focus on understanding how high LMX and low power distance encourage voice. Despite attempts to identify how relationship quality shapes upward challenge, there is a lack of understanding about how a low quality or formal relationship with superior shapes upward challenge. Therefore, in order to answer the main research question, how does perceived formality shape upward challenge, the following research question must be answered beforehand:

RQ2.1. How can a formal relationship with superior be defined?

Summary

The superior is the person from whom most subordinates withhold voice. As a formal representative of the organisation, the superior uses their power to make decisions and ensure their implementation. However, it is precisely the power that superiors enjoy that seems to cause subordinates to remain silent. For example, studies have shown that subordinates are fearful of speaking up to superiors in case it ends up with negative career consequences for

them. The power differentials give superiors the ability to punish or reward subordinates for embarrassing them or criticising their decisions. Additionally, subordinates and superiors have a relationship which is characterised by the closeness or distance that they experience. Therefore, a formal relationship with superior is also likely to be defined as a distant relationship.

Although there has not been much research done to understand how relationship quality shapes voice and silence, and even less specifically on upward challenge, the evidence suggests that a low quality or formal relationship results in lower levels of voice overall, less upward challenge to a superior and where there is upward challenge to a superior, it is more likely to be done by email rather than face to face. The study by Turnage and Goodboy (2016) is considered important for the present study because it highlighted a link between relationship with superior and communication channel, suggesting that the formality of the relationship with the superior might shape the channel that subordinates use to challenge. However, Turnage and Goodboy (2016) did not indicate whether they considered email to be a formal channel or not. Therefore, the next section will now consider how the perceived formality of the channel that is used to challenge a superior is likely to shape upward challenge.

3.1.3 Defining Formal Communication

In order to answer the main research question “how does perceived formality shape upward challenge?”, the second way in which a subordinate might consider a formal conversation with their superior was through the communication channel that they were using to speak to each other. Communication to a superior can take place using either formal or informal communication channels (Kreps, 1990).

As was highlighted in Chapter One, the voice and silence literature has differentiated between formal and informal communication, but formal and informal communication can be defined in a number of ways. The first way is by communication channel. Examples of formal communication channels provided in the literature have included suggestion systems, grievance procedures, quality circles, worker councils, ombudsman services, open door policies, one-to-one meetings, email, question and answer programs, and survey feedback (Kowtha, Landau, & Beng, 2001; Mowbray et al., 2014; Spencer, 1986). Attempts have been made to more generally explain the difference by referring to formal channels as “codified, pre-arranged, and regular/concrete structures” (Marchington & Suter, 2013 p.286) and informal channels as conversations taking place “outside a structured process” (Klaas et al., 2012 p.324) or through the “ad-hoc or non-programmed interactions between management and their staff” (Marchington & Suter, 2013 p.286). Recent literature on informal communication in the workplace has also referred to channels such as Facebook and Twitter (Zhao & Rosson, 2009), Instant Messenger (Isaacs, Walendowski, Whittaker, Schiano, & Kamm, 2002), text messaging (Svendsen, Evjemo, & Johnsen, 2006) and video-conferencing (Fish, Kraut, Root, & Rice, 1992), highlighting the importance of technology and computer-mediated communication in organisations.

The second way in which communication can be classified is by its characteristics. Formal communication can be characterised by its pre-planned nature (Kraut, Fish, Root, & Chalfonte, 1990), its association with standardisation of information, its ability to reduce discretionary power of superiors (Harlos, 2001), its tendency to make a permanent record of the information exchange (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996) and its ability to provide protection for subordinates in terms of support following voice (Kowtha et al., 2001). With regards to informal communication, descriptions are broader than for formal

channels and have emphasised its verbal, face to face, highly interpersonal nature and its unplanned and interactive nature (Kraut et al., 1990). For example, informal communication has been described as personal or social messages (Bratton, Sawchuk, Forshaw, Callinan, & Corbett, 2010) rumour and gossip (Van Iterson, Waddington, & Michelson, 2011) or talking (Knippen, 1974). The interpersonal nature of informal communication means that it is less likely that there will be a written record of the information exchange.

Unlike traditional forms of informal communication which have focused on verbal interactions, computer mediated forms of communication use writing rather than verbal face to face interaction, suggesting that the traditional assumption that informal communication was usually face to face and formal communication was usually written may no longer hold true. One example of such ambiguity is email, which despite previously often being used for informal communication, is now more likely to be classified as formal communication due to its ability to be archived (Lovejoy & Grudin, 2003).

Despite recent claims that there is a general consensus on understandings of formal and informal communication channels (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2014), it has been shown that individuals do not have consistent views of formal and informal communication. For example, Harlos (2001) found only a 70% consensus on the formality of nine communication channels. A panel of experts was asked to rate the nine communication channels according to formality, low, medium or high, using the following definition “the degree of standardization of voice systems and their protocols, including the degree to which systems are formally specified” (Harlos, 2001 p.329). The only communication channel rated as high formality was grievance procedure. Channels such as open-door policy and suggestion box were marked as low formality. The panel of

experts consisted of four individuals from two countries (Canada and New Zealand), including the author, a university mediator, an arbitration lawyer and the director of a complaints resolution office in a large hospital. Despite the lack of consensus on the formality of the nine channels, Harlos (2001) didn't appear to explore the reasons for their disagreement. Nevertheless, this study is the only one to have attempted to understand if there is a consensual interpretation of formal and informal communication and it was found that there wasn't.

The study by Harlos (2001) showed that in practice, the difference between formal and informal communication is unlikely to be as clear-cut as the literature suggests. Traditionally, communication was considered to be formal and informal based on easily distinguishable characteristics. For example, formal communication was considered to be documented and top-down. On the other hand, informal communication was expected to be unplanned and "leave little or no permanent record" (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996 p.29). However, with the advent of technology within organisations, it has been argued that the lines between formal and informal communication have become blurred. Video conferencing is a good example of such blurring as it demonstrates the ability for technology to mimic the face to faceness of informal communication whilst providing the ability to document the conversation by recording the exchange (Fish et al., 1992). More recent examples might include Skype or Facetime which are used routinely in some organisations.

It has therefore been argued that formal and informal communication is not defined by channel, but by six factors which shape the way that individuals perceive formality (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). The six factors can be explained using the Communication Situation Model (CSM), a model designed to highlight that communication in a technology-intensive environment is likely to be subject to perception rather than constancy. Given the

large number of computer-mediated channels present in organisations such as email, Facebook, Instant Messenger and video-conferencing, it is argued here that most modern organisations are likely to be technology-intensive, making this a model which is still applicable 20 years after its original conception, if not more so than previously. Below is a brief explanation of the different elements of the CSM.

The six factors include the content of the information (content), the relationship between the subordinate and the superior sharing the information (relationship), the culture of the organisation (culture), the duration and frequency of the information exchange (temporality), the extent to which someone is cognitively and mentally involved in the communication exchange (involvement) and the influence that a subordinate believes they have in a given situation (control). Each of these factors was considered likely to influence each other, meaning that communication is a complex and highly individualised phenomenon.

The six factors in the CSM belong to two different levels; social context and interaction context. The social context level is considered to have a macro-level focus meaning that the three factors associated with social context are thought to be outside of the subordinates' immediate control: content, relationships and culture. On the other hand, the interaction level is considered to have a micro-level focus and therefore, the three factors are consciously used by individuals to shape their communication decisions: temporality, involvement and control. Both the social and interaction levels are believed to influence each other meaning that all six factors are important in determining how individuals perceive formal and informal communication.

The social context level explains that the organisational culture will largely shape the types of relationships that are permitted within an organisation (culture), the types of

behaviours that are appropriate within the relationships (relationship), and the types of things that people are likely to talk about (content). Therefore, the model highlights that subordinates operate according to communication norms within the organisation. For example, in a hierarchical organisation, it might be considered inappropriate for an hourly paid worker to communicate directly with a senior superior about work matters. In fact, in most hierarchical organisations, upward communication would be expected to be done through the levels of hierarchy. Attempts to do otherwise might be considered to be insubordination and as a result, are not considered acceptable. By having an appreciation of the social context that shapes communication choices, it is possible to understand that the way in which subordinates challenge their superiors is likely to be determined by the wider environment which has shaped their views of what types of communication are possible and what is appropriate. By viewing communication decisions in this way, the CSM asserts that communication is not shaped by channel alone, but by a wider set of factors which reflect the individual perceptions of the social context in which individuals work.

At the interaction context level, individuals make decisions about how to communicate with each other in ways appropriate for the social context as described above. They must make a decision about the timing of communication (temporality). For example, it is possible for subordinates and their managers to have a face to face conversation where they interact simultaneously, but it is also possible to send them an email or leave them a note, removing the simultaneous nature of the conversation. However, the way in which subordinates and their superiors communicate with each other is also shaped by the physical and psychological proximity they have with each other (involvement). For example, if a subordinate and their superior sit next to each other, it might be more usual to have a face to face conversation, but if they work in different locations, they might be more likely to communicate using email. The final factor refers to the amount of influence that an individual

considers that they might have over the way the communication takes place and the desired outcome (control). So, for example, if the subordinate considers themselves to have a high degree of control, they might be more likely to have a face to face conversation knowing that they have a greater chance of achieving their desired outcome. On the other hand, if they believe themselves to have little control over the situation, they might be more likely to choose a method that requires less effort realising that their chances of success are limited. Therefore, the model assumes that perceptions of formality will exist where subordinates and their superiors have little or infrequent contact (involvement), where the subordinate feels little influence during the communication exchange (control), and where the subordinate has very little control over the method of communication (temporality).

The CSM model asserts that subordinates make decisions about how to communicate with their superior based on the resources that are available to them, the types of relationships that they have with their superior, and the goal that they wish to achieve. The six factors within the CSM help to explain the factors that shape communication choices that individuals make. Given the complexity of organisations and the many channels through which subordinates have the opportunity to speak to others, it is assumed that subordinates will choose from a range of communication channels that suit the situation.

When considering how perceptions of formality are created within organisations, the CSM does not explain specifically how the choices made by individuals represent the difference between formal and informal communication. Furthermore, the model was not specifically referring to upward communication, or upward challenge so the model must be used with caution. Nevertheless, it highlights that perceptions of formality could be different for different individuals and that defining formality and its influences is likely to be important in order to understand how perceptions of formality shape upward challenge.

In summary, formal and informal communication were traditionally considered opposites by many scholars because of the clear differentiation of characteristics defining formal and informal communication. However, the formality of communication in modern organisations is likely to be determined less by the channel or its characteristics but by the situation in which the channel is used. In this way, it is possible to suggest that formality is socially constructed. The next section will now consider what the existing literature suggests may be the influence of perceived formality on upward challenge.

3.1.4 How Does Perceived Formality of Communication Shape Upward Challenge?

When considering the importance of formal and informal communication for voice, there is very little literature that has looked at the way that subordinates pass information to their superiors and how this makes a difference to their propensity to voice. It is argued here that subordinates are acutely aware of formality that exists in organisations because of the risks associated with speaking out of turn, and therefore it is possible that formality associated with channels of communication will make a difference to voice behaviour.

A recent review of the antecedents shaping voice and silence identified that formality was a key theme which underpinned many of the findings to date in the voice and silence literature (Klaas et al., 2012). Formal communication can be viewed by the organisation as the most effective form of communication because it acts as a conduit for passing information from the subordinate to the superior (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Where formal channels exist, voice will be more likely because where organisations provide channels specifically to capture voice, it is considered to be legitimate and therefore less risky (Klaas et al., 2012). Therefore, as formality has benefits for achieving substantive goals (Stinchcombe, 2001), it is possible that voice could be more effective if it were to be governed by a series of formal processes and procedures (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

There are two reasons why formal communication channels exist in organisations. Firstly, they may be mandatory by law. For example, all organisations are required to have a grievance procedure to allow subordinates to make complaints if they feel they have been unfairly treated (www.gov.uk, 2016a). Where formal channels are mandated by law, workers have greater opportunity to voice and contest management decisions (Barry & Wilkinson, 2015) because channels already exist giving easy access to superiors and formal channels make it more difficult for superiors to escape the need to act on the information (Harlos, 2001).

Secondly, the presence of formal communication channels can allow superiors to easily find out information from subordinates by providing a channel through which certain types of information are expected to be passed (Katz & Kahn, 1978). For example, formal communication channels such as shift reports and daily meetings are often based on the need for subordinates to share task-related information, which they are expected to provide as part of their role description. The benefits of formal communication are therefore that superiors are more likely to hear specific types of information as subordinates have an available channel through which voice is invited.

On the other hand, informal communication can use whatever channels are available to it, owing to its unscheduled and unregulated nature. By viewing formal communication as a way to collect information which is considered to be useful by the organisation, it is possible to see that formal communication channels might encourage individuals to pass information. For example, it could be that where formal communication channels signal a legitimacy of voice, subordinates perceive this as less risky, thereby encouraging them to voice (Klaas et al., 2012). On the other hand, owing to the public nature of formal communication, superiors may feel embarrassed if a formal attempt at voice is made, which may appear to the superior as if the subordinate was being

deliberately challenging and provocative. In these circumstances, it is likely that the subordinate will view voice as more risky where it is not clear whether the superior welcomes voice using that formal channel. Therefore, it is possible that individuals perceive different levels of risk according to the degree of perceived formality that they feel.

On the other hand, informal channels have also been linked to increased propensity to voice (Klaas et al., 2012; Marchington & Suter, 2013). For example, Marchington and Suter (2013) carried out interviews and questionnaires in nine of 300 branches of a UK restaurant chain, to understand how superiors used formal and informal communication to encourage voice from their teams. They found that when superiors posted a notice on the noticeboard, which was classed as formal communication, subordinates wished to talk about it with each other and with their superior, which then led to more informal types of communication.

Voice has been acknowledged as a way of reducing the power differentials between subordinates and superiors (Barry & Wilkinson, 2015; Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon, & Wilkinson, 2011; Morrison & Rothman, 2009). Within organisations, superiors are more powerful because of the formal processes and procedures which provide them with legitimate position power (French & Raven, 1959). The power differences result in those less senior being disadvantaged in certain situations through an inability to influence outcomes (Stinchcombe, 2001). However, voice through formal channels can give more power to subordinates than informal channels because it is more difficult for superiors to turn a deaf ear to information as a result of the processes and procedures which accompany formal exchanges of information (Peirce, Smolinski, & Rosen, 1998). Although voice can overcome the inherent power differences that exist within a hierarchical organisation by enabling subordinates to voice their opinions, it is

not always desirable for superiors to have their power eroded, suggesting that they might discourage voice where possible (Barry & Wilkinson, 2015). For example, Krefting and Powers (1988) argued that superiors did not consider voice to be important when they wanted control over how they managed the organisation. By allowing subordinates to express their opinions, it reduced the amount of management discretion that superiors could have. On the other hand, there may be subordinates who do not wish to be powerful, therefore eschewing efforts to involve them in voice. Therefore, it could be said that formal communication has the potential to provide certain groups with more power but only if they want it (Stinchcombe, 2001).

The impact of information exchange using channels where ambiguity exists about its nature was highlighted by Lovejoy and Grudin (2003). They identified that Instant Messenger had previously been the preferred and much-used form of informal communication between subordinates within one particular organisation. However, following a software upgrade, the exchanges were recorded where previously they hadn't been. This meant that subordinates no longer used Instant Messenger to chat frequently, or about personal issues, knowing that others had the potential to view their conversations.

The importance of understanding how participants define formal communication is to establish whether there are differences in perception which explain different voice behaviours for individuals. It is therefore possible that subordinates and superiors will also have differing views over formal communication, given its multiple definitions and socially constructed nature.

Therefore, it is important to answer the following research question:

RQ 2.2 How can formal communication be defined?

Chapter Three Summary

Research has shown that subordinates are reluctant to challenge a superior because they are scared of upsetting the superior owing to the influence that they have over the career progression opportunities for the subordinate. The superior plays a formal role in the organisation (Rank, 2008), so it is possible that it is the perceived formality of speaking to a superior that makes subordinates reluctant to speak up. It is therefore possible to conclude that perceived formality shapes voice and silence because subordinates perceive that it is a risky behaviour. However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to defining how the subordinate perceives a formal relationship with their superior and what they consider to be formal communication making it difficult to know the influence of formality over upward challenge. A formal relationship with superior could be defined by the power differentials that exist between subordinate and superior, or by their level of relationship quality. Studies have indicated that a poor relationship with superior is likely to lead to lower levels of upward challenge and voice in general, but there is little understanding of how poor relationship quality and perceptions of high power differences reduce upward challenge. Therefore, it is important to understand how a subordinate defines a formal relationship with their superior to identify how it shapes upward challenge. Perceived formality could also be determined through the communication channels that a subordinate uses to challenge upwards. There has been very little research to understand the influence of the communication channel on voice and silence or upward challenge. In order to understand how formal and informal communication are linked to upward challenge, it is important to understand how the users of these channels distinguish between formal and informal communication. This will then provide a view as to how formal communication might be linked to upward challenge.

Chapter Four Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to make explicit the assumptions that have been made in designing this qualitative research study. The concepts of ontology and epistemology are introduced and the philosophical views of the world and beliefs about how knowledge is gained are explained. The ways in which ontological and epistemological views shaped the methodology are then described followed by an outline of the methods that were used for data collection and analysis.

Research Context

The current study took place in one force of the UK Police Service (UKPS). There are 43 police forces across England and Wales, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland comprising over 150,000 officers across the UK (Home Office, 2015; Police Service, 2016; Scottish Government, 2016). The mission of the UKPS is to prevent crime and protect the public (College of Policing, 2016b). In order to do this, the UKPS provides 24x7 emergency response to all residents within the UK as well as providing support on a non-emergency basis. To fulfil the requirements of an emergency service, officers work a shift system which provides cover 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year. Officers are based out of a number of different police stations across a city or area in order to provide a timely response for emergencies, as well as maintain a level of presence on the UK streets.

The UKPS has a tall hierarchical structure with ranks ranging from Chief Constable at the top to Police Constable at the lower end, eight ranks beneath. When trying to assimilate this to literature which has been written for a non-policing audience, the Chief Constable would be the equivalent of a Chief Executive Officer (Loveday, 2013) whereas the ranks of Inspector and Chief Inspector, levels three and four from the bottom would be the equivalent of middle management. Police officers are expected to provide between 35 and 40 years'

service. The UKPS have been subjected to a number of very high profile scandals in recent years, each of which has received intense media pressure, highlighting the interest that the UK public have in the way that the UKPS operates. Furthermore, the damage to organisational reputation that such scandals can cause has been highlighted.

Within the participating police force, Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors were assigned to either Neighbourhood Patrol Group (NPG) or Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT). NPG is the 999 emergency response part of the organisation where officers work on a rota to provide 24x7 cover. On the other hand, SNT comprises a community liaison role which requires officers to work Monday to Friday only and covering core hours of 7am to 10pm only. The organisational design across all forces is likely to be very similar, with officers working shifts and being geographically dispersed across their region.

4.1 Philosophical Assumptions

This section describes the researcher's philosophical underpinnings drawing upon the concepts of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology.

Ontology

Ontology refers to the essence of phenomena and the nature of their existence (Gill & Johnson, 1997). In other words, "what kinds of things really exist in the world?" (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997 p.5). There are two predominant ontological views from which the research question could have been explored. Firstly, the etic view holds that a single, objective reality exists. That is to say, that there is one truth and that the aim of the research project is to uncover that single truth. It exists independently of the individual and can therefore be studied in isolation (Cunliffe, 2010). Secondly, the emic view argues that there is no reality beyond people's subjective view of the world, highlighting that there is likely to be a range of different realities that exist in the world (Creswell, 2007). Given the socially constructed

nature of formality, an emic view has been adopted for this research in order to take into account the number of ways in which formality could be perceived.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of the criteria by which we determine what does and does not constitute warranted or valid knowledge (Gill & Johnson, 1997). A discussion about epistemology allows us to answer the following question “How is it possible, if it is, for us to gain knowledge of the world?” (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997 p.5). In other words, how should we go about investigating the research question? Traditionally there have been two main types of epistemology: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism is the “notion that truth and meaning reside in their objects independently of any consciousness” (Crotty, 1998 p.42). Consistent with the etic view of reality, objectivism assumes that an accurate and certain reality is waiting to be discovered and therefore the aim of research is to find that reality. On the other hand, subjectivism emphasises the role of perception in shaping how people view the world, and there is therefore unlikely to be one reality out there waiting to be discovered (Gill & Johnson, 2010). Smith, Harre and Van Langenhove (1995) highlighted the value of research carried out in the real world, rather than in a laboratory. They argued that field studies are likely to be a closer reflection on psychological life and therefore have meaning for those wishing to apply the findings to their daily lives. Qualitative methods recognise the central role of language and therefore attempt to understand the psychological conceptions of participants (Smith et al., 1995). Gill and Johnson (2010) argue that it is inevitable that researchers influence what they see by interpreting their findings according to their own views. This is because perception plays a large part in how we understand the world. The key assumptions made during this research design are that reality is socially constructed and therefore a subjective epistemology has been adopted.

4.2 Qualitative Research

Following a discussion of philosophical assumptions underpinning this research study, this section will describe the methodology that has been used. The importance of methodology is that it shapes the way in which researchers go about studying the phenomenon under question (Silverman, 2006).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a term usually associated with qualitative research (Bosley, 2004). Interpretivism argues that people's behaviour is shaped by the subjective meaning that they associate to their actions. The interpretivist approach was largely developed in response to the positivist approach which views the world as objective and favours quantitative methods to find a true reality. Interpretivism is usually inductive research meaning that the findings are derived from the data, rather than from theory (Bryman, 2012). Given the highly social nature of organisations, an interpretivist perspective for this research has been adopted which will focus on individual views about how formality is perceived and how formality shapes upward challenge.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a form of interpretivism and constructionist researchers are concerned with the processes of interaction among individuals in a quest to understand how meaning is derived. One of the main premises of social constructionism is that it encourages researchers to question taken for granted assumptions (Burr, 2003). The objectivist stance would suggest that the world yields itself to researchers easily, and that all they need to do is measure what is happening. However, social constructionism encourages researchers to be more cautious of accepting assumptions about the world. Burr (2003) cautions against believing that the categories that human beings have given the world reflect real divisions,

instead encouraging researchers to look at the nuances between the categories and accept that they are often arbitrary and boundaryless.

During this research project, the main research question sought to understand the ways in which perceptions of formality made a difference to the way in which upward challenge occurred in an organisation. The nature of formality in the workplace is a social construction and therefore it is likely that perceptions of formality will have been constructed between myself and the participants during the interview process.

Abductive Research

This research study was designed using an abductive research strategy. Abductive reasoning is a form of logical inference which goes from an observation to a theory which accounts for the observation, ideally seeking to find the simplest and most likely explanation (Bryman, 2012). This involves the researcher perceiving relationships between facts and identifying possible causal links to hypothesise the reasons for behaviour (Peirce, 1931/1960 as cited in Verde & Nurra, 2010). Abductive research is advocated as the most appropriate method of theory construction in interpretative social science (Blaikie, 2007). It fits well with an idealist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology because it places the social world as described by actors as the only way to truly understand what is happening in everyday life. It is concerned with studying people in their natural environment in order to gain an “insider” viewpoint on their behaviour (Douglas, 1971 as cited in Blaikie, 2007).

The starting point for abductive research is usually an observation or an experience of a social phenomenon for which there is no clear reason or meaning. Abductive research is focused on understanding and explaining why people do what they do, and not testing or generating theory (Weber, 1964 as cited in Blaikie, 2007). This is in stark contrast to the most popular forms of social enquiry, inductive and deductive research, which are both designed to

test theory. As a result, without theory testing, abductive research is not able to talk about certainty, or statistical probability but weaves facts together into a narrative that makes suggestions about what might be possible or probable explanations for behaviour (Verde & Nurra, 2010). Furthermore, abductive research could lead to the generation of hypotheses which could go on to be tested using inductive or deductive strategies in subsequent research studies.

The present study originated from a question that I posed to myself when considering voice from a practitioner perspective “how does a subordinate know when they are having a formal conversation with their superior?” Following a review of the literature which provided me with very little insight into the role of formality on voice, it was therefore important to design a qualitative study which would provide an opportunity for exploration of this topic.

4.3 Judging the Quality of Qualitative Research

Judging the validity of qualitative research can be subject to three errors; seeing relationships where there are none; failing to see relationships where they exist; and asking the wrong questions and eliciting the wrong data (Kirk & Miller, 1986 pp 29-30 as cited in Flick, 2014 p.483). Parker (2004) argues that validity, judged ultimately by the reader, means that the writer should provide the criteria through which they wish to be judged. This allows the writer to point out the differences of their research from other research in the field and allow readers to judge for themselves if they find the results valid. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that there are four criteria which can be used to judge the quality of qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Each will be explained in more detail below and its relevance for this study explained.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the believability of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that a period of prolonged engagement is important for ensuring the findings are relevant for the culture to which they relate. I have had a range of exposure to policing and its culture which I believe lends credibility to my research. Prior to working at the University of Sheffield, I worked with a number of police forces, briefly as a Special Constable with Strathclyde constabulary, and more recently as a management consultant with West Midlands Police Force. I also worked for three months at the College of Policing in the Research, Analysis and Information team between June and September 2013 writing research papers to support the case for evidence-based policing. Throughout my time working in the policing arena, I have worked with uniformed and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officers ranging from Police Constable to Superintendent, civilian staff, and civil servants working to support the UK Police Service. Furthermore, my dad was a Chief Inspector with Greater Manchester Police, so I have grown up as a member of the extended police family. I therefore feel that the findings that I have presented demonstrate as deep an understanding of the police culture that any outsider can hope to gain. When researching policing and the police culture, there is an abundance of policing literature which provides insight and understanding to many areas of policing. As a member of the College of Policing library, the world's largest collection of books about policing, I have had privileged access to resources, some of which are difficult to obtain including PhD theses in the field of policing, and the support of librarians who were able to help me find what I was looking for.

One aspect that Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued helps to demonstrate credibility is the amount of time spent observing various aspects of a setting, speaking with a range of people, and developing relationships and rapport with participants. They argue that development of rapport and trust facilitates understanding and co-construction of meaning

between researcher and members of a setting. The data collection took place over a four-month period from September to December 2014. Prior to, and subsequent to the data collection, a number of meetings were held with the project team where I was able to discuss my experiences, my findings and my interpretations and make sure they were appropriate to the policing culture from which they were derived. I have spent between one and two hours with each of the 19 participants during the interviews, a further two hours during the focus group with the Inspectors, and a further 20 hours with the project sponsors discussing directly or indirectly my research. I have presented the findings to the project sponsors who include a Superintendent and Theme Lead for Code of Ethics, the Continuous Improvement Manager and the Career Services Manager. Also present were a temporary Chief Inspector on the Force Change team, a temporary Chief Superintendent who was also the Head of Corporate Services who all agreed that my research was meaningful and practical. The data in this study is therefore considered to be credible.

Transferability

Also referred to as generalisability, resonance (Tracy, 2010) and external validity (Yin, 2009), the aim of transferability is to show how the findings might be applicable to other organisations, situations or samples outside of those in which the data was gathered. To achieve this aim, the author should provide as much description about the findings and how they were shaped by the context in which the data was gathered in order to allow others to understand how the process might relate to alternative contexts (Geertz, 1973).

Yin (2009) argued that case studies aim to generalise a particular set of results to a broader theory, known as analytic generalisation. This is in contrast to quantitative research which aims to demonstrate the likelihood of similar findings in other samples, known as statistical generalisation. One critique of qualitative research can be that the findings do not

relate to anything outside of the context in which they were gathered. Qualitative research aims to demonstrate the complexity of research and explores in detail the phenomenon under question (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, the value of qualitative research is to provide insight into nuances within the theory which then allows others to evaluate the application of theory to different contexts with better precision.

Dependability

Also referred to as reliability, the aim of dependability is to ensure that the process could be repeated and the findings compared with those reported in the current study (Bryman, 2012). Whereas the aim of dependability for quantitative research would be to allow others to repeat the study exactly and compare findings, the interpretative nature of qualitative research means that the findings are unlikely to be the same in other studies. However, by describing the data collection procedures, population properties and data analysis techniques, it allows others to design similar studies to investigate similar phenomena (Yin, 2009).

Qualitative research has a number of natural limitations to dependability. This is based on the belief that all researchers bring their own viewpoints and opinions to bear on the way they arrive at their findings, suggesting that no two pieces of qualitative research are directly comparable (Parker, 2004). Furthermore, on embarking upon qualitative research, an assumption is made that participants will be able to articulate their view of the world to the researcher in a meaningful way (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999 as cited in Parker, 2004). However, participants may be unwilling or unable to do this, therefore again posing a further barrier to reliability. Finally, qualitative research is useful for highlighting change and instability so it is entirely possible that other studies will not reach similar conclusions because of the effects of conducting the research at a different time period.

Given the above limitations to replication of findings, Flick (2014) refers to procedural reliability as being of great importance in qualitative research to allow replicability of the study. The greater documented the research process, the more chance a subsequent researcher has of carrying out a similar or contrasting study. For case study research, a case study protocol can be very useful in demonstrating to others how the study was designed (see Appendix 6). It must be made clear in the findings which are the participants' responses and which are the researcher's interpretations. This provides a more accurate view to the reader of the topic under exploration and makes it easier for subsequent studies to compare their findings (Yin, 2009).

Confirmability, Axiology and Reflexivity

Confirmability refers to the possible intrusion of researcher values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of reflexivity aims to highlight where the researcher believes that their views, values and experiences may have shaped the findings. It is important to disclose these to the reader so they can make their own judgements about the extent to which they believe the researcher influenced the data collection and the findings. Hiles (2008) argued that the values of the researcher are of paramount importance in shaping the nature of the research study and could potentially be even more important an influence than ontology and epistemology, in particular, when using a constructionist paradigm. Confirmability is important for the reader to feel that the research process was high quality before being able to have confidence in the nature of the findings and how these have informed subsequent theory development. Bryman (2008) argued that the values of a researcher can shape all areas of a research study, from the original choice of topic, the choice of method and the conclusions drawn. It is even possible for the researcher to become so close to the participants that they are unable to separate their values and how these differ from those of the participants. It is therefore important for the researcher to differentiate the views of the participants and the

views of the researcher during the data analysis process. The process of reflexivity is therefore very important to the quality of qualitative research by providing a step in the process where researchers call into mind their influence on the outputs produced. Although bias in research is inevitable, it is important to be upfront about the type of bias and where this bias is likely to have shaped the study (Smith, Harre, & Van Langenhove, 1995). Therefore, a reflexivity section has been included after the discussion to acknowledge areas where my biases may have shaped the way that I have designed the study or interpreted the data.

Plummer (1995) suggests that bias can be present in either the participant, the researcher and the interaction between the two and therefore suggests examining the three different domains as part of a reflexive exercise. Plummer argues that the bias which shapes findings can be measured using a continuum from pure participant account at one end of the scale to researcher's account at the other end. He argues that a systematic thematic analysis falls half way between the two, the findings being a co-construction created by inputs from the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the process of reflexivity aims to make transparent the likely contributions of each.

Reflexivity refers to “the recognition that the involvement of the researcher as an active participant in the research process shapes the nature of the process and the knowledge produced through it” (Cassell & Symon, 2004 p.20). The researcher has responsibility for not only designing the research study, but also recognising their role within the research process and how this might shape the research findings. Cassell and Symon (2004) suggest that interviewers can influence the nature of participant responses through their own behaviour and the way they ask questions. As a result of being aware of researcher influence, Tracy (2010) argued that the role of reflexivity strengthened the quality of research by bringing vulnerability, honesty and transparency to the research process. By doing so, the

qualitative researcher, through self-reflexivity, would be able to bring to the fore the “shielded or hidden” things that are often overlooked in quantitative research. The role of reflexivity is being able to identify not just what is being said by participants, but to identify what else may be shaping participant responses. For example, Parker (2004) argued that reflexivity enables the researcher to take into account additional influences on the research findings, situating them in a particular cultural or economic context.

To become aware of assumptions, biases and values and how these may have influenced the research design and data analysis, I kept a reflexive journal to capture my thoughts about the research process. For example, with regards to the literature review, I captured thoughts about problems I encountered in trying to understand papers or arguments, how I was feeling, areas where I was confused, links between different literatures and things that hadn't been discussed, amongst other things. It was through the use of my reflexive journal that I became aware of the need to investigate formality. I was particularly interested to understand why formality was not being discussed given that it seemed to be causing many subordinates to remain silent rather than speak up to a superior. Instead, the focus was on encouraging voice through the use of informality, reflecting an assumption that formality caused silence, an assumption so fundamental that the topic had been largely overlooked.

The ways in which perceptions of formality shape voice and silence is a very under-researched area and therefore, well-suited to the abductive approach that a qualitative methodology allows. Although there is a literature on communication, and a separate literature on voice and silence, the two areas of research have rarely been addressed together, despite arguments that formal aspects of organisations are likely to be important in shaping upward information sharing behaviour (Jablin, 1982). Singleton (1988 as cited in Silverman, 2006 p.46) highlighted the immersive nature of qualitative research arguing that field research was important to “gain first-hand knowledge of the situation”. Singleton went on to

emphasise the exploratory and descriptive nature of qualitative research, which is especially useful in areas where little is known about the phenomenon. Therefore, my research will contribute to theories about voice and silence by collecting rich in-depth data from a number of participants.

Silverman (2006) argued that “the main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena which are simply unavailable elsewhere” (p.43). Much of the literature on voice and silence has focused on quantifying the occurrences of withholding information, showing that between 50% and 75% of all subordinates have at some stage withheld information from their superior (Fang, Kim, & Milliken, 2014). The aim of using qualitative methods is to explore the factors that shape voice and silence, something which quantitative research has a limited ability to do.

An ideographic approach emphasises that to truly appreciate human behaviour, the researcher has to gain access to the world using other people’s perspectives (Gill & Johnson, 1997). This approach would usually be associated with an emic ontology which emphasises the subjective nature of the world and how individuals attribute meaning to their actions and behaviours. The epistemological view of interpretivism emphasises the subjective nature of the world and therefore is associated with a highly individualised approach. Given the fact that I have an emic ontological view and an interpretivist epistemological view, an ideographic approach to data gathering has been adopted and the methods I have chosen emphasise the individual and subjective nature of my research.

The existing literature has focused on exploring the most common reasons that withholding takes place from an individual perspective (Morrison, 2011). However, what is less abundant in the literature is knowledge about the contextual factors that influence a subordinate’s decision about whether to speak up or not (c.f. Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Silverman (2001) would therefore argue that the literature presents a rather biased contribution to understanding voice. As explained in the literature review, perceptions of formality could be important in encouraging or preventing subordinates from sharing information with their superior. I therefore aim to raise awareness of the ways in which perceptions of formality are created in the workplace, and in doing so will investigate contextual influences on voice.

Individuals' understanding of formal communication is not consistent and although it has some common characteristics, contains a lot of ambiguity and difference in meaning (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). Therefore, the use of interviews allowed for a thorough exploration of what formal communication meant to the participants. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998, as cited in Cassell & Symon 2004) drew attention to the role of language as being central to understanding social reality. MacKenzie Davey and Liefoghe (2004) stated "words are not fixed in their meaning and the ways in which they are used will have an impact on our understanding of the world" (p.181). Given the inductive nature of this research study, the qualitative methods chosen provided me with flexibility in being able to pursue salient areas of research, based on themes and areas of interest which arose during the interviews (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994).

I felt that a qualitative methodology was well suited to my skills. I spent many years as a management consultant, conducting interviews with subordinates and superiors at all levels of the organisation to understand communication issues. Furthermore, I have carried out qualitative interviews as part of MSc research projects and have therefore demonstrated my ability to conduct research for both practical and academic audiences. Hermanns (2004 as cited in Flick, 2014) highlighted the importance of being able to differentiate between theoretical and practical questions, the latter providing access to the life world of the interviewee. I started originally as an ESRC/UKCES/SAMS Management and Business

Development Fellow, a national scheme aimed at reducing the gap between practice and theory within academia by recruiting business individuals to re-train as academics.

Therefore, this research has dual aims. First, it will appeal to an academic audience by extending theory about factors influencing voice and silence. Second, my research will have practical implications to help the UKPS translate and apply these research findings.

Summary

This study has been designed on the premise that the world is socially constructed, and therefore there are multiple realities of the world. By accessing individuals' views, a wider understanding of how perceptions of formal communication may shape upward information sharing can be gained. Given the philosophical assumptions discussed, a qualitative approach was best suited to investigate this phenomenon. In line with social constructionist views, the role of reflexivity by the researcher has featured highly in identifying the role of the organisational context, the economic climate, the presence of the researcher, and the participant's role and position within the organisation and how these may have shaped both the researcher's and the participants' contributions to the research process.

4.4 Methodological Considerations

There are two voices which can be heard in qualitative research; the researcher's and the participant's (Blaikie, 2007). In order to ensure that the findings remain faithful to social actor's world, the researcher should attempt to place the participant's voice foremost, ensuring that all interpretation of meaning is as closely related to their views as possible. Schutz (1963b as cited in Blaikie, 2007) suggested a method which involved the generation of first and second order codes. The first order codes must be directly derived from the social actor's worlds and must translate their views and understandings as closely as possible. The second order codes must aim to provide an interpretation of the behaviour in terms of a wider

understanding of social behaviour, but they must still retain proximity to the original social actors' accounts (Blaikie, 2007). If not, there is a risk of distortion or contamination (Plummer, 1995). In order to avoid this, it is possible to ask the participants to reflect on the findings and provide feedback to see if they can imagine themselves in the world that has been described and explained (Blaikie, 2007).

Important in explaining the findings is a description of the context in which the social actors operate as this is assumed to influence their behaviour. Participants are viewed as experts at navigating through social life, making sense of the situations that they find themselves in (Blaikie, 2007). In order to gain access to the insider viewpoint of the social world of actors, the researcher should attempt to understand what people need to know and do in order to go about their daily life (Blaikie, 2007). Therefore, the data collection process should be focused on asking questions which ask participants to make explicit things that they currently take for granted. In order to access the implicit and taken for granted assumptions that people use to navigate their social worlds, researchers may need to adopt novel methods which gain access to information that participants might find difficult to explain and may not even be aware of. When drawing conclusions, the researcher must describe as fully as possible the context in which the data were gathered, to allow other readers to build their own conclusions about how the research will apply in other situations (Douglas, 1971 as cited in Blaikie, 2007).

There is one limitation to be aware of when studying voice and silence. Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003) highlighted the fact that silence was largely unobservable in field studies as it was not possible to know if the speaker was withholding the information or why without asking them. As a result, they argued that motives for silence were often misattributed by observers. Reflecting this methodological limitation, most studies exploring

voice and silence involve self-report answers as only the individual themselves know whether they chose to share or withhold information about something and why.

Inherent in self-report studies is a bias known as social desirability (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). Withholding information can be a form of social desirability. Social desirability comprises two elements; self-deception and impression management, meaning that an individual could amend their response to make it something which they feel will be more acceptable either to themselves (self-deception), or to the audience (impression management). Many studies on withholding information which test the ways in which individuals pass information rely on self-report data. This in itself is subject to the withholding of information for the reasons mentioned above, making the topic of silence very challenging to study. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that lead people to withhold as it is such a widespread phenomenon. Due to the nature of withholding, individuals who are reluctant to speak up at work may also be reluctant to talk with a researcher about occasions when they have remained silent with their superior. Furthermore, even if they can be encouraged to speak to a researcher, the individual may not always understand their motivations behind their behaviour (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Despite the limitations of self-report studies described above, the method I chose was self-report because it was important to know whether someone withheld information or not before exploring their suggestions to explain their behaviour. Studies have shown that participants are able to recognise when they withheld information from their superior and are able to identify why. For example, Milliken and colleagues (2003) identified that 85% of individuals had withheld information from their superior at some time during their career, and the participants were able to give them a list of reasons why did this. Without self-report study, it is more difficult to make visible the mental models through which individuals make decisions about upward communication.

4.5 Participant Selection

This research was carried out in two organisations. A UK Local Authority served as the pilot organisation whilst the main participating organisation was a UK Police Force. A pilot study was carried out in order to understand if the methods would yield the type of data to answer the research questions. The pilot organisation, a UK Local Authority was selected following contact from a senior manager expressing a desire to be involved in my research on information sharing. I gained access to a UK Police Force through an alumnus at the University of Sheffield. The initial contact with the participating organisations involved an email which contained relevant information about my research. In both organisations, I was subsequently put in contact with a project sponsor who co-ordinated the research activity locally.

The choice of pilot organisation was determined by a combination of opportunity and suitability as a sample. I was approached following an ESRC Festival of Social Sciences workshop on my research topic by a senior manager at a local authority organisation who wished to know more. Over a period of months, I built a relationship with the organisation, delivering a subsequent workshop to senior managers and finding the staff engaged and helpful. I therefore approached them about taking part in my research study as a pilot organisation which they readily accepted. The organisation bore some resemblance to the UKPS in that it was a tall hierarchical organisation, and in the public sector so experiencing similar economic challenges. My requests for the pilot were that I interviewed matched pairs of subordinates and superiors in order to capture perspectives from different hierarchical levels. The reason for studying matched pairs was to identify different or similar perspectives between subordinates and their superiors in order to understand if this was important to understand how perceptions of formality shaped voice and silence. I focused on the bottom

levels of the organisation to capture views of individuals who are usually those with the least ability to voice dissatisfaction.

In order to determine the main participating organisation, three theoretical foundations were used to identify an organisation which would be most likely to provide rich data for this research project. The first was the Exit, Voice and Loyalty model based on work by Hirschman (1970) which aimed to predict those contexts in which subordinates would be most likely to share dissatisfaction about management decisions. The second was a framework proposed by Morrison and Milliken (2000) which provided a number of contextual features of organisations which might prevent subordinates from voicing their concerns to management. The third was a theory of information distortion presented by Athanassiades (1973) which highlighted a link between hierarchical organisations and information distortion.

The first theoretical perspective was a model that aimed to predict when voice and exit were most likely to occur. This model was discussed in Chapter Two and was accompanied by Table 2 which provided a summary of the relevant aspects of this model. As discussed in the literature review, this model was underpinned by barriers to entry and exit resulting in a set of conditions which were most likely to result in either voice or exit. Although none of the situations exactly described the UK Police Service, it is most likely that police officers would feel the same barriers to entry and exit as those in cells 3 and 4 for the reasons explained below.

Kaufman (2015) highlighted that the voice and silence literature has largely neglected the role of economic context, yet it is argued strongly that this is very important in shaping voice. It is therefore important to highlight the current economic climate which may have shaped participant responses in the UK Police Service because this could affect the way

in which Hirschman's model is applied. The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) of 2010 required the UK Police Service and all other public sector organisations including the Local Authority used in the pilot study to make budget cuts and savings. Across the public sector, the cuts have been unpopular, resulting in voluntary and compulsory redundancies, organisational restructures and low morale. In 2015, the government tasked public sector organisations with making yet more savings, meaning public sector workers faced uncertainty over whether they would have secure employment in the future. Within the UK Police Service, the CSR commissioned the independent Winsor Review in 2010 (Jarrett, 2012) which focused primarily on areas such as pay, entry conditions, talent management and retirement age in order to identify areas where savings could be made. Many public sector organisations turned to compulsory redundancy to achieve their budget targets, but as police officers are Crown servants and not employees they cannot be made redundant (Jarrett, 2012). This means that police officers, unlike other public sector workers are not likely to fear losing their jobs as a result of the CSR. On the contrary, the UKPS has traditionally been seen as providing a job for life. The option to retire after 30 years' service on full pension but with the added option to stay longer if necessary has always been seen as attractive and was successful in incentivising police officers to stay for the full 30 years. However, since the CSR was announced, the expected service of a police officer has risen to between 35 and 40 years. It is possible that the option to retire on full pension continues to act as an incentive to officers and could therefore prove to be a high barrier to exit. This could therefore suggest a high propensity to voice according to Hirschman's model (1970) as illustrated by cell 3 (see Table 2). On the other hand, despite the fact that economic conditions and an inability to be made redundant might suggest high levels of voice, the UK Police Service (UKPS) also possesses certain characteristics which might indicate a high propensity for silence. For

example, the difficulty in finding similar alternative employment could lead police officers to believe that exit is not possible (cell 4) and therefore speaking out would be unwise.

In the past, the entry requirements for the police service were less stringent suggesting that entry was easy (cell 3). However, the UKPS has over recent years been striving to improve career opportunities for its officers. In fact, it is now the emergency service that recruits the most university graduates, indicating an attractive prospect for ambitious professionals (Loveday, 2013). This is likely to see an increase in ambitious individuals with a desire to rise to the top of the organisation, making the organisation an even more competitive place than before.

Another important outcome of the Winsor Review (Jarrett, 2012) has been an increased focus on the professionalisation of the police service. Recommendations were made for increased entry requirements for Police Constables to have either a level three qualification, the equivalent of two A levels, a police qualification or experience as a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), Special Constable or in a police staff role identified by the Chief Constable as relevant (Winsor, 2012). This has led to the requirement for officers to acquire qualifications including undergraduate degrees and Masters degrees as a prerequisite for promotion. This drive for professionalisation has also led to changes in the recruitment process with the Metropolitan Police Service now requiring all applicants for the role of police officer to have completed and passed a Certificate in Policing Knowledge prior to applying which they must self-fund (College of Policing, 2016a). This must be completed with an authorised provider of training and requires approximately 300 hours of study, split between self-study and taught elements and costs between £900 and £1000. Another change brought about by the Winsor report was a recommendation that “direct entry to police Inspector rank should be aimed at graduates drawn exclusively from “Russell Group” universities (Home Office, 2013 as cited in Loveday, 2013, p.2). Therefore, this increased

professionalisation demonstrates an increasingly high cost of entry which could shape voice or silence behaviour, depending on availability of alternative employment opportunities (cells 3 and 4) (see Table 2).

The second theoretical perspective was a model which described characteristics of the senior management team and the formal organisation that might exert an influence over individual and collective voice (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The model suggests that superiors dislike receiving feedback, especially critical of their behaviour or decisions, and so they consciously or unconsciously discourage voice. An educational background in finance or economics, a senior management team with a high average tenure or a demographic dissimilarity to subordinates lower down the hierarchy suggest that the senior management team will be less likely to receive feedback because these factors are associated with a lack of upward information flow. The model also describes a number of organisation design features which are also likely to suggest high levels of silence. These include a lack of formal upward feedback mechanisms and centralisation of decision making.

The third theoretical perspective was a model which described how subordinates distorted information intended for their superiors. Due to its highly process-driven culture, the UKPS was thought to be an organisation where subordinates were likely to distort upward information. In a study designed to investigate the effects of different types of hierarchy on information flow, Athanassiades (1973) compared two types of organisation, autonomous and heteronomous. The autonomous organisation, described as an organisation “whose authority structure allowed its members a considerable degree of authority and responsibility for defining and implementing goals, standards and performance criteria”, comprised a US university faculty (p.212). The heteronomous organisation, described as an organisation “whose members were closely subordinated to their superiors, where members are controlled by an elaborate system of rules and regulations which allow little room for individual

initiative and responsibility” comprised a US police force (p.212). Thirty participants from each organisation filled in a number of self-report questionnaires which they were assured would not be seen by anyone else. The thirty officers from the US police force belonged to the bottom rank of the organisation. The thirty officers from the US university faculty were from all levels of the organisation but only those without any supervisory responsibility for direct reports. Participants were asked to fill in one of the questionnaires twice, but on the second occasion, the participants were told that the results would be shown to their superior. The measure of distortion was calculated as the difference between information given in the confidential questionnaire and that which was shown to their superior. The results demonstrated a statistically significant difference between distortion at the university and the police force, with the police force showing greater levels of distortion.

As has been demonstrated, the hierarchical structure in the police force has been linked to upward information distortion (Athanasziades, 1973). However, it has also been argued that within a rank and file organisation, all superiors face the same pressures that subordinates at lower levels face when deciding whether to speak up or not (Detert & Edmondson, 2006 as cited in Ashford, Sutcliffe & Christianson, 2009). Therefore, research is required to see if superiors and subordinates react similarly or differently when interpreting perceptions of formality and its relationship to upward communication.

The participating organisations agreed to take part due to their commitment to learning about, and subsequently improving their working environment. In the case of the UK Local Authority, they have a longstanding history of collaborating with academic institutions to carry out research, which benefits both their employees and also members of the public. Feedback was provided following the pilot study to a group of subordinates comprising participants and senior managers including the Head of Learning and Development and the Head of Research, Evaluation and Innovation. The UK Police Service

has a strong commitment to evidence-based policing, heavily encouraged by the College of Policing. Furthermore, the police force that took part in this research had a very strong commitment to continuous improvement. In particular, they indicated that the results of this research would be incorporated into their leadership training programme to improve communication between officers and their superiors.

Determining the number of participants

Mention is frequently made, when discussing qualitative research, of representative sample sizes. Patton (2002) argued that there are no rules governing sample size during qualitative inquiry because representative samples are relevant only if the aim of the research is to generalise from a sample to a wider population. However, very rarely is generalisation the aim of qualitative research. The aim of the data collection strategy was to provide an “expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002 p.246) and to provide insight into a topic about which relatively little is known. Yin (2009) differentiated between generalising to a population and generalising to a theory. He argued that qualitative research was aimed at generalising to a population, thereby not claiming any contributions other than that which applies to the participants. However, it is reasonable to expect that the contributions may also be applicable to other populations with similar characteristics such as any of the other 44 UK police forces.

Another topic often discussed when talking about qualitative data is the concept of data saturation. Mason (2010) provides a range of differing views about the value of such a concept, presenting cases both for and against saturation. Regardless of individual views about saturation, Morse (1995 as cited in Mason, 2010) highlights that in order to claim data saturation, the researcher needs to be able to substantiate their claims. To assist with this process, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) provide an operational definition of data saturation

as “the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” (p.65). Further, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that saturation should be concerned with the point where gathering and analysing new data becomes counterproductive and additional information adds little to the overall claims of the research. Inherent in both of these guidelines is the emergent nature of data analysis through interviewing which involves carrying on until data saturation has been reached. Despite the fact that some scholars argue that data saturation should drive the number of interviews, the study by Mason (2010) found that the number of interviews in PhD research appeared to be determined based more on guidelines by other researchers (for example, see Guest et al., 2006), rather than a feeling of data saturation. This would suggest that data saturation is aspirational rather than achievable and therefore not an appropriate target for a time-bound piece of research such as a PhD. As a result, the present study did not attempt to gain data saturation but to provide an insight into the way that perceived formality shaped upward challenge through examining one UK police force.

Participant selection criteria

The purpose of this section is to outline the ways in which participants were selected. There were a number of factors. First, hierarchical level was a main criterion for stratification. For all studies, the participant recruitment strategy was stratified purposive sampling (Patton, 2002). This means that the sample was not random as would normally be the case in quantitative research. Instead, the sample was stratified by rank because there is literature to suggest that there are different levels of influence shaping how different hierarchical levels behave (Horton, McClelland, & Griffin, 2014). Therefore, despite the fact that a purposive sample provides a range of characteristics which help to provide insight into the effects of formality on upward challenge, the limitation of a purposive sample is that the

results are not assumed to be generalisable outside of the population, therefore restricting the potential transferability of the research findings (Bryman, 2012).

There has been very little research into the differences that hierarchical level can make to voice despite evidence to suggest that this could be an important factor (Cole & Bruch, 2006; Corley, 2004; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). This study therefore differs from others for a number of reasons. First, it has concentrated on highlighting the differences in voice behaviour by hierarchical levels. Other studies have focused on identifying commonalities across all hierarchical levels, or the distinctions between groups of “subordinate” and “superior” information sharing behaviour. For example, despite Milliken and colleagues (2003) finding evidence of widespread withholding of information from superiors by subordinates, the results were not differentiated by hierarchical level. In another example, Detert and Edmondson (2011) found that implicit beliefs about voice behaviour were not significantly different between subordinate or superior samples. However, a number of studies have highlighted that hierarchical level could be an important differentiator of behaviour. For example, Bryant (2003) found that subordinates at the bottom level of the organisation might use withholding in different ways to those more senior to them. Bryant (2003) carried out 22 interviews with shop-floor workers and low-level managers to understand their attitudes to voice during times of organisational change. Bryant found that voice was viewed by the participants as detrimental for career progression because dissent was not viewed positively by superiors and therefore subordinates, fearful of limiting their career prospects, remained quiet. This study demonstrated that individuals at different levels of the organisation are likely to perceive voice and silence differently because of the differential risks inherent in speaking up. Gaines (1980) also found that subordinates were keen not to discuss routine problems with their superiors in order to demonstrate their ability to deal with problems, viewing silence as an opportunity to impress their superiors with their

ability to deal with problems by themselves. Horton, McClelland, and Griffin (2014) found that subordinates at different levels of hierarchy had different identities, which were believed to shape their behaviour. Therefore, it could be expected that groups of subordinates at different hierarchical levels share collective beliefs that shape their individual behaviour.

Further, this research focuses on participants from the same organisation with a view to providing consistency with respect to the processes and structures that might shape their behaviour. By examining data from the same organisation, it gives the opportunity for contextual influences to become more apparent, as themes can be identified which might be common across all participants (Yin, 2009).

Recruiting participants

During the pilot stage, the main communication for organising the study was done through email. I sent the project sponsor two information sheets detailing the nature of the research (see Appendix 2). I also drafted an email for the project sponsor to send internally to publicise my research and ask for volunteer participants. The project sponsor sent the draft invitation email to the senior management team which covered all departments within the organisation. The senior managers were asked to forward this within their teams. Twelve volunteers came forward initially but only six participants were required so I randomly chose six volunteers and contacted them to arrange dates and times for the interviews. I felt that six interviews comprising three matched pairs would be sufficient for me to test the methods and understand if the data collection methods were effective to study the research question. Following this initial recruitment exercise, all subsequent communication between myself and the participants was conducted directly using email or telephone. The data was collected during six individual interviews in June 2014. The pilot study comprised three methods; semi-structured interview, card sort activity and concurrent think-aloud. All three methods

were administered during the same session. I met with each individual at the employee place of work in a small office away from the working environment to minimise distractions.

For the UK Police Force, the data was collected in two stages which have been called “stage one” and “stage two”. For stage one, which was designed to be a pilot study to understand if the methods were suitable for gathering data to answer the research questions in a policing environment, the project sponsor was sent the information sheets for the two bottom levels of the organisation, Police Constables and Sergeants (see Appendix 3). It stated on the information sheet that the Chief Superintendent of their area had supported the research. The project sponsor recruited six volunteer participants comprising three Constables and three Sergeants and organised dates and times for the interviews. The data was collected during six individual interviews in September and October 2014. I conducted the interviews at their place of work in a small office away from their main office space to shield them from distractions. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. The interview schedules can be seen in Appendix 4.

Following completion of stage one, I met with the project sponsor and explained that the pilot study had been successful and the methods proved suitable at gathering the required data. I then requested more participants for stage two, which would be the main study. It was agreed between myself and the project sponsor that Inspectors and Chief Inspectors would be used for the next stage because the project sponsor was aware that there were instances of poor communication between these ranks and she wanted further understanding of why this might be the case.

For stage two, an email was sent to a different project sponsor to assist with recruitment for the next two levels of the organisation, Inspectors and Chief Inspectors. It stated on the information sheet that the Deputy Chief Constable was sponsoring the research.

The email invitation to participate was sent out to a number of Inspectors and Chief Inspectors. The project sponsor then compiled a list of those that had volunteered. There were eight volunteers at Inspector level and five at Chief Inspector level. The project sponsor arranged meeting dates and times with each participant. The data was collected during thirteen individual interviews in November and December 2014. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and a half. The interview schedules can be found in Appendix 5. The research took place at the force sports and social club. This was in order to allow the officers to explore their thoughts away from the operational environment. No incentive was offered to any of the participants for taking part. Table 3 describes the number of participants from the UK Police Service that took part in this research study. The pilot data from the Local Authority organisation was not used in the analysis of the overall results so details have not been provided.

Table 3. *Participants and the stages of the study in which they took part*

| Rank | Number | Card Sort and Semi-structured interview | Focus Group |
|-----------------|---------------|--|--------------------|
| Constable | 3 | Y | N |
| Sergeant | 3 | Y | N |
| Inspector | 8 | Y | 8 |
| Chief Inspector | 5 | Y | N |
| Total | 19 | 19 | 8 |

A total of 19 participants completed stages one and two of the study. All participants were uniformed officers from one UK Police force and comprised the bottom four levels of the UK Police Service hierarchy. In order of ascendancy from the lowest they are: Police Constable (PC), Sergeant (S), Inspector (I) and Chief Inspector (CI).

Table 4 contains more details of the participants. The participants comprised seven females and 12 males of which three were non-superiors and held no direct reports (Constables) and 16 were superiors with at least one direct report (Sergeants, Inspectors and Chief Inspectors). The location column has been used to demonstrate that seven participants were based in the same working location. The remaining 12 participants were located in different stations across the force. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to preserve anonymity.

Table 4. *Participant details from stage one and stage two in the UKPS*

| Number | Name | M/F | Job Title | Superior status | Location | Role |
|---------------|-------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1 | MPC1 | F | Police Constable | Non-superior | A | NPG |
| 2 | MPC2 | M | Police Constable | Non-superior | A | Internal |
| 3 | MCP3 | F | Police Constable | Non-superior | A | SNT |
| 4 | MPS1 | M | Police Sergeant | Superior | A | Internal |
| 5 | MPS2 | F | Police Sergeant | Superior | A | SNT |
| 6 | MPS3 | M | Police Sergeant | Superior | A | SNT |
| 7 | MI1 | M | Police Inspector | Superior | B | NPG |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|---|------------------------|----------|---|----------|
| 8 | MI2 | M | Police Inspector | Superior | H | SNT |
| 9 | MI3 | F | Police Inspector | Superior | C | NPG |
| 10 | MI4 | M | Police Inspector | Superior | A | NPG |
| 11 | MI5 | M | Police Inspector | Superior | D | NPG |
| 12 | MI6 | M | Police Inspector | Superior | E | NPG |
| 13 | MI7 | F | Police Inspector | Superior | K | NPG |
| 14 | MI8 | F | Police Inspector | Superior | F | SNT |
| 15 | MCI1 | F | Police Chief Inspector | Superior | G | Both |
| 16 | MCI2 | M | Police Chief Inspector | Superior | L | Both |
| 17 | MCI3 | M | Police Chief Inspector | Superior | D | Both |
| 18 | MCI4 | M | Police Chief Inspector | Superior | I | Both |
| 19 | MCI5 | M | Police Chief Inspector | Superior | J | Firearms |

Legend. M/F = male /female.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the philosophical underpinnings of this research study, highlighting its interpretative and social constructionist nature. Our limited understanding into perceived formality and upward challenge has highlighted the importance of a qualitative research design, yet there are certain limitations to researching voice and silence which have shaped the methodological design. Finally, this chapter has explained how the participant sample was identified and participants were recruited. In order to understand more about the methods that were used and how they contributed towards an understanding

of the effects of perceived formality on upward challenge, Chapter Five will highlight their suitability for researching this topic and the way in which data was collected and analysed.

Chapter Five Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The present study used four methods which were designed to complement each other by providing different perspectives on the nature of formality and how it shaped upward challenge. The four methods comprised semi-structured interview, card sort, concurrent think-aloud and focus group. Each participant attended an individual appointment where three of the four methods were used: semi-structured interview, card sort and concurrent think-aloud. The appointment opened with semi-structured interview questions, and the card sort and concurrent think- aloud took place at a suitable stage during the appointment. Further semi-structured interview questions followed where appropriate. The focus group was conducted one week after the individual appointments. This chapter will therefore provide an introduction to the four methods that were used during the present study. An initial overview of each method will be given along with a description of the way each method was incorporated into the overall study design. Finally, data collection processes are described and the analytical framework through which the data were analysed will complete this chapter.

5.1 Overview of Methods

Card Sort

Card sort is a method adapted from Q methodology originally developed by Stephenson (1935). Q methodology has been defined as a “quintessentially alternative methodology for those dealing with discourse and text” (Stainton Rogers, 1995 p.178). Quantitative research identifies similarity whereas Q methodology identifies differences. Card sort is an effective way to facilitate conversations with individuals about a particular topic and then use the results as a platform for further exploration. For example, Matteson, Merth and Finegood (2014) used a card sort to improve communication between patients

undergoing a programme of pre-surgery weight loss and their healthcare providers. The card sort activity was used to elicit positive and negative information about the individual's perception of their own eating behaviour. The participants were then asked to describe the support that they would need to change their negative behaviours into positive ones. This process provided the researchers with a view into areas of support which were sensitive to individual differences and which were unlikely to have arisen during a typical clinical visit to discuss weight loss. For example, the researchers found that participants were less likely during the consultation with their healthcare provider to acknowledge their actual eating habits, focusing instead on portraying an image of their behaviour they wanted them to see, therefore preventing the participants from addressing destructive habits and identifying appropriate support to change.

Figure 1 shows how the researcher aims were met by the card sort.

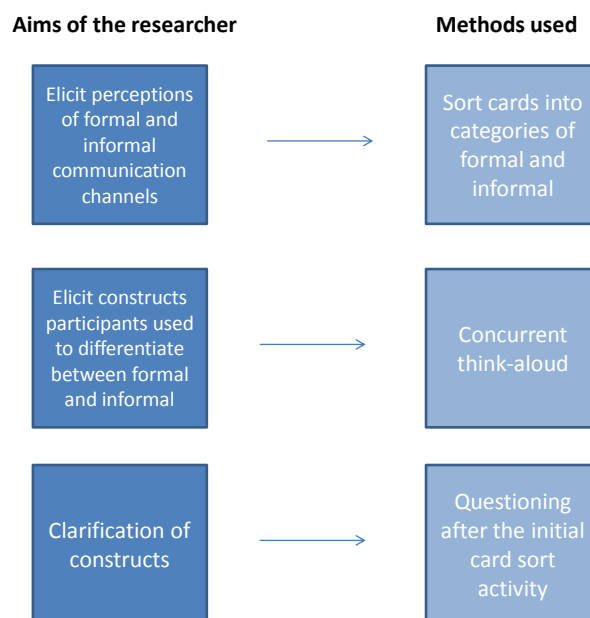


Figure 1: How the card sort design met researchers' aims

Due to the ambiguity in definitions of formal communication, rather than simply asking participants to talk about formal communication, I used a card sort exercise to elicit a definition of formal communication in their workplace. I did this for two reasons. First, as demonstrated in the literature review, understandings of formal communication are ambiguous (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). Second, by using cards which contained specific communication channels, I was able to clarify meanings rather than asking general questions about communication which often lead to hypothetical answers.

The card sort is useful for measuring subjectivity (Stainton Rogers, 1995) and capturing data that is difficult to verbalise (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015). For example, when considering how to gather insight into a particular phenomenon, Evered and Louis (1981, as cited in Cassell & Symon, 2004) highlighted the different merits of “inquiry from the inside” and “inquiry from the outside” (p,152). Furthermore, Brown (1996 as cited in Cross, 2005) described the card sort as being able to capture “life as lived from the standpoint of the person living it”. The card sort was therefore deemed suitable to capture social constructions of communication because it allowed participants to express what formality and informality meant to them.

Concurrent Think-Aloud

Concurrent think-aloud (Todhunter, 2015) is a data elicitation method which requires participants to verbalise their thought processes whilst performing a task (Jääskeläinen, 2010). Research has shown that asking participants to share information concurrently about their decision-making processes reveals more insights into the decision-making steps between stimulus introduction and the final choice outcome than retrospective accounts (Kuusela & Paul, 2000). It was used to capture reasons for the categorisation of formal communication. Although the main interest of the card sort was to define formal

communication, in order to help the participants identify constructs which may not have been obvious to them, the category of informal communication was used to serve as a contrast by which to help participants differentiate constructs. The advantage of the qualitative card sort method was that it helped to explain why participants categorised channels as either formal or informal, therefore requiring less interpretative input from the researcher than quantitative methods might to understand the differences (Kuusela & Paul, 2000). Cross, (2005) argues that the result of the card sort activity represents participants' interpretations rather than absolute definitions owing to the fact that people make sense of their environment by attaching meaning to things around them. Therefore, the card sort activity combined with concurrent think-aloud was useful to access interpretations of formal communication which might otherwise not have been discovered.

Focus Group

In order to counteract the effect of self-report bias which is common in card sort and semi-structured interview, focus groups were used as they have been shown to regulate self-report inaccuracies through challenge or support from others within the group (Basch, 1987). Furthermore focus groups were carried out in order to improve validation of the interview process by examining if the topics that participants talked about in a group were different from those discussed individually (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The focus of the individual interview was to explore the direct interactions between subordinate and superior whereas the focus group provided an opportunity to explore the contextual influences more collectively. Therefore, using a focus group as part of the study design enhanced the validity of the responses by providing group answers representing contextual influences over upward challenge, rather than this research relying on individual views shaping upward challenge. This bridges a gap in the voice and silence literature where research focuses on either

individual influences or contextual influences, but rarely are both reported in the same research study.

Semi-Structured Interview

The use of a responsive, semi-structured interview was designed to capture general patterns of upward information sharing whilst still allowing scope to explore interesting topics raised by the participant (Flick, 2014). The interview was also the main method by which the participants were asked about aspects of their relationship with their superior which they perceived of as formal. Given the pressurised nature of police work, I felt that asking participants to attend an interview would give them time to reflect on what I was asking them. Self-report studies are necessary to study voice and silence, so interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method because relatively little is known about how perceptions of formality shape voice and silence at individual or collective levels.

In summary, the interview was used to ask participants about the nature of the relationship they had with their superior and what might lead them to perceive this as formal. The card sort activity was used as a way of eliciting perceptions of formal communication in a consistent manner across all participants. Concurrent think-aloud was used to capture the constructs that participants used to differentiate between formal and informal communication. A focus group was then used to explore the contextual level variables that might shape perceptions of formality. Each method was consistent with an interpretative epistemology and allowed meanings to be explored and clarified during the research process.

The next section will provide more detail on how each of the methods was designed.

5.2 Method Design

Card Sort

The design of the card sort comprised two main areas of consideration. Firstly, which cards should be included in the card sort. Secondly, how many categories should be given to the participants. This section will therefore explain how the card sort was designed before talking about how the study was administered and the data collected.

How were the channels derived? This section explains how the channels used in this study were chosen. I felt it was important to choose communication channels with which the participants were familiar to elicit meaningful categorisations. Therefore, a combination of previously defined formal and informal channels from the literature and my personal experience of the UK Police Service were used to generate an initial list of channels. Table 5 below shows examples of the literature classification of the channels used in this study. These are used as indicative labels rather than absolute ones given the ambiguity surrounding classification of some communication channels.

Table 5. *Communication channels and their categorisation according to literature*

| Communication Channel | Categorisation | Authors |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Appraisal Review | Formal | Korsgaard, Roberson, & Rymph (1998) |
| Email | Formal and Informal | Lovejoy and Grudin, (2003) |

| | | |
|---------------------|----------|--|
| Facebook | Informal | Zhao and Rosson, (2009) |
| Grievance Procedure | Formal | Katz and Kahn, (1978) |
| Meetings | Formal | Bratton et al., (2010) |
| Suggestion box | Formal | Katz and Kahn, (1978) |
| Telephone | Informal | Lievrouw and Finn, (1996) |
| Text Message | Informal | Svendsen Evjemo and Johnsen, (2006) |
| Twitter | Informal | Zhao and Rosson, (2009) |
| Video Conferencing | Informal | Fish et al., (1993) |

Following the initial list of communication channels, certain of the channels were adapted based on the researcher's previous experience of working in organisations, because these were believed to make a difference to the way that communication works in an organisation. Two organisation-specific channels, Morning Briefing and Airwave Radio, were also added. As a result, the original study design comprised 17 cards as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. *Communication channels given to the first participant*

| Original Channel | Adapted Channels | Organisation-specific Channels |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Appraisal Review | Appraisal Review | Morning Briefing |
| Bumping into superior | Bumping into superior | Airwave Radio |
| Email | Email | |
| Facebook | FB group message | |
| | FB personal message | |
| | FB wall post | |
| Going unannounced to superior's office | Going unannounced to superior's office | |
| Grievance Procedure | Grievance Procedure | |
| Scheduled Meetings | Scheduled Meetings 1-2-1 | |
| | Scheduled meetings group | |
| Suggestion box | Suggestion box | |
| Telephone call | Telephone call | |
| Text Message | Text Message | |

| | | |
|------------------|------------------|--|
| Twitter Post | Twitter Post | |
| Video Conference | Video Conference | |

The card sort activity was used during the semi-structured interview to allow further questioning about the factors shaping the decisions made by the participant as part of the card sort, therefore strengthening the value of the card sort by improving understanding of the categorisation process (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Focus Group

Focus group roots can be found in the 1950s when it was discovered that it was a useful method for creating a safe and comfortable environment to explore sensitive topics (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956 as cited in Kruger & Casey, 2015). Therefore, it is viewed as a technique which allows the researcher to gather data on feelings and opinions of small groups of participants about a given problem or phenomenon (Basch, 1987) “The purpose of conducting a focus group is to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product or service” (Krueger & Casey, 2015 p.2). Therefore, I incorporated a phenomenological approach to this research because I was interested in seeing the world as the participants (Calder, 1977 as cited in Basch, 1987).

According to Kruger and Casey (2015), focus groups typically have five characteristics. 1) It is a small group of people, 2) who possess certain characteristics, 3) who provide qualitative data, 4) during a focused discussion, and 5) who provide insight to others about a particular topic of interest. These criteria will be used to describe the nature of the focus groups carried out in this study.

The particular topic of interest for the focus group was to explore challenges to voice within the UK Police Service as perceived by the participants. The study design incorporated two focus groups, one for Inspectors and one for Chief Inspectors. Each was designed to contain the same participants who had also taken part in the individual interviews. Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested that between five and eight participants was optimal because this provided the opportunity for each participant to contribute whilst providing a range of topics for discussion. Eight Inspectors and five Chief Inspectors took part in this study so only one focus group per rank was deemed necessary. Calder (1977) argued that homogeneity led to greater levels of interaction between the participants which in turn led to a more representative view of the topic. I was keen to avoid power differentials from preventing those with a lower rank from speaking up, so I created focus groups with participants from the same rank (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Cassell and Symon (2004) highlighted the importance of distinguishing between natural and created groups. On the one hand, the Inspectors and Chief Inspectors could be classed as a natural group. That is to say, that they worked for the same organisation, were of the same rank and essentially carried out the same duties. However, it was very unusual for them all to work together due to the geographical boundaries of their work and the nature of shift work. Therefore, it is possible that the focus group would have felt unnatural to the participants. In that way, the group could be classed as created. The created group was advantageous for me because it placed me as a central influence in the group context, as opposed to trying to take part in an established group where my presence could be overlooked. However, I worked very hard to ensure the unnaturalness of the focus group did not prevent openness and honesty in the room. I also ordered refreshments which were available throughout the focus group, something which is thought to make respondents feel more comfortable (Basch, 1987). I had also met all of

the participants previously for the individual interviews, but not all of the participants knew each other, prompting me to ask everyone to introduce themselves beforehand.

Semi-Structured Interview

The advantage of qualitative research is the richness of data that is captured, and the natural complexity and diversity of social life that is revealed (Cassell & Symon, 2004). The questions were based on concepts highlighted by the voice and silence literature that were considered relevant to the study on formality on upward challenge.

The next section will describe how the data were collected.

5.3 Data Collection

Card Sort and Concurrent Think-Aloud

The placement of the card sort activity in the interview was not fixed but it always took place after the initial interview questions to ensure that the participant was feeling comfortable. The process for the card sort was explained in a short oral briefing. Each participant was given a number of cards, each with a different communication channel on them. Some of the communication channels were likely to have been found in any medium to large organisation. For example, Grievance Procedure or Appraisal Process. Others were specific to the UK Police Service. For example, Morning Briefing. The objective of the exercise was for them to place the cards onto the table in front of them, and to categorise each card as either formal or informal whilst considering communication to their superior or from their subordinates where appropriate. For example, Constables did not have any subordinates so they were asked about their superior only, but Sergeants, Inspectors and Chief Inspectors all had both subordinates and superiors.

The participants were given a fixed number of cards and categories initially but told that they could add cards or categories where appropriate. Also, they were allowed to put cards into a category called “not relevant” if they felt that the channel did not apply to them. This has been described as a free card sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Whilst doing this, they were asked to speak out loud and explain their thought processes. This is a technique known as concurrent think-aloud (Todhunter, 2015) which is designed to capture mental models which would remain otherwise hidden. The participant was encouraged to complete the first categorisation of the card sort activity alone using concurrent think-aloud and then, following their initial attempt at the exercise, I asked them questions to clarify why they had put the cards into the categories they had. This formed part of the responsive semi-structured interview (Flick, 2014).

During the card sort data collection, many changes were made to the original channels that were used. The free card sort exercise allowed the participants to create additional categories and cards so that I could gauge if the categories and channels chosen had been meaningful to the participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This approach proved useful to highlight my lack of understanding about how the channels were used in practice which led to the participants requesting a number of cards to be modified (Table 7) and added (Table 8) because the original cards were not representative of their available communication opportunities. Whilst carrying out the card sort, most participants created an additional category which signified that the channel could be either formal or informal. This has been termed “both” for this study.

Table 7. *Modifications to original channels*

| Original Channel | Modified Channel | Category | Who suggested modification? |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Telephone call | Mobile Phone Call Work | IF | Participant 3 - Sergeant |
| | Mobile Phone Call Personal | IF | Participant 3 - Sergeant |
| | Telephone Call Landline | IF | Participant 3 - Sergeant |
| Text message | Work Mobile Text | IF | Participant 3 - Sergeant |
| | Personal Mobile Text | IF | Participant 3 - Sergeant |
| Airwave Radio | Point to Point radio | n/a | Participant 2 - Sergeant |
| | Talk-through radio | n/a | Participant 2 - Sergeant |
| Video Conference | Video Conference DMM | IF | Participant 7 - Chief Inspector |
| | Video Conference Lync | IF | Participant 7 - Chief Inspector |

The reasons for the changes made to the original set of channels have been described below.

Airwave radio. This was changed to Talk-through radio and Point to Point radio. There are two modes in which the Airwave radio operates. Talk-through radio is the facility that exists so control can liaise with patrols and organise response to a particular incident. In the case of Talk-through, all on-duty police officers and the control centre are able to hear the conversation, as well as members of the public if they have the correct equipment. The conversations are recorded. On the other hand, Point to Point radio is a facility that exists for officers to talk to each other privately. No-one else can hear these conversations and they are not recorded, unless the officer chooses to listen to the conversation on loudspeaker allowing others to listen too.

Telephone call. This was changed to work mobile phone call, personal mobile phone call and telephone landline. When the Police Constables were doing the card sort activity, they felt that when talking about telephone calls it was important to draw the distinction between work mobile and personal mobile. This was driven by a work policy stating that work mobiles could be used for personal calls and text messages, but personal calls must be paid for by the officer themselves. As a result, many Constables chose to use a personal mobile for personal calls to avoid working out how much they had spent on personal calls and texts on the work mobile. Despite the fact that police officers do not need to take their work mobile out of the station after they have finished a shift, many of the Constables and Sergeants used their personal mobile to receive and make work calls outside of working hours to keep up to date with developments. The more senior participants at the levels of Inspector and Chief Inspector tended to have only a work mobile phone but they also used this to make personal calls. One participant explained to me that more senior individuals were less likely to be concerned about the nature of their conversations on the work mobile, whereas as for a new recruit, there was a level of wariness about information using equipment that belonged to the organisation. Most

participants also described preferring to use a landline telephone when in the office so this channel was added too.

Text message. This was changed to personal mobile text and work mobile text. As above, given the customary nature for some participants to use their personal mobiles alongside or instead of their work mobiles, participants explained that it also made sense to change the original card from text message to work mobile text and personal mobile text.

Video Conference. This was changed to Video Conference DMM and Video Conference Lync. One Chief Inspector explained that most officers were likely to associate Video Conference with the Daily Management Meeting (DMM). The DMM is a mandatory requirement for Inspectors, Chief Inspectors and Superintendents. Participants take part in this meeting via video conference because of the different locations at which officers are based. The timing of this meeting is at 8.45am. However, not all participants had access to video conferencing facilities as the software had not been installed in all areas of the force. It was also explained to me by the Inspectors and Chief Inspectors that there was a personal video conferencing facility that was available on their PC called Lync. Previously known as Skype for business, this was used to speak to colleagues instead of the phone so this channel was therefore also included.

The reasons that new channels were added has been described below.

Daybook. For ranks of Inspector and Chief Inspector, daybook was added. There was a requirement for these ranks to keep a personal record of their decisions in this book. Although the contents were not routinely scrutinised, it could be seized as evidence if necessary and therefore, filling it in was viewed as an essential part of their role.

Although this was not used to communicate with their superior directly, it was used to formally record details and decisions made during informal conversations.

Monthly Management Meeting. This was added by one Chief Inspector who explained that they had monthly management meetings with their Inspectors.

Table 8. *Added channels*

| Added Channels | Category | Who added it? |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Daybook | n/a | Participant 8 - Inspector |
| Monthly Management Meeting | n/a | Participant 15 - Chief Inspector |

As a result of the modifications over the course of the card sort activities, the cards provided to the final participant were greater in number from those given to the first. The final list is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. *Communication channels given to the final participant*

| General Channels | Organisation-Specific Channels |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Appraisal review | Daybook |
| Bumping into superior | Monthly management meeting |
| Bumping into me | Morning briefing |

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Coming unannounced to my office | Point to point radio |
| Email | Talk-through radio |
| Facebook group message | Video Conference (DMM) |
| Facebook wall posts | Video Conference (Lync) |
| FB personal message | |
| Going unannounced to a superior's office | |
| Grievance procedure | |
| Mobile text work | |
| Mobile work phone call | |
| Personal mobile call | |
| Personal mobile text | |
| Scheduled 1-2-1s | |
| Scheduled meetings group | |
| Suggestion box | |
| Telephone call landline | |
| Twitter post | |

Changing categories. On some occasions, the participant chose to change their categorisation of a channel during the questioning phase because their rationale was not consistent with the placing of other cards. Where participants had changed their categorisation following questioning, a separate card sort table was created. In these cases, for each participant two tables were used to capture the findings; an original card sort table and an amended card sort table. An example can be found in Appendix 1.

Focus Group

The focus group was held after the interviews as it was felt to be advantageous that the participants had met me first and understood what the study was about before taking part in a focus group. Despite the fact that two focus groups were planned with Inspectors and Chief Inspectors, only the one for Inspectors actually took place. The focus group were asked to respond initially to a question “What are the main barriers to upward communication in [name of police force]?” and I had prepared questions in the event that the focus group were reticent or weren’t interested in exploring a particular question. Only two additional questions were asked of the focus group because the discussion was lively and fruitful. “What type of information should superiors be hearing about?” and “What can you do to change upward communication for the better?”

Feedback from the Inspectors at the end of the focus group said that they had enjoyed the focus group, that they felt the topics were representative of current issues within the organisation and that all attendees had been open and honest in their contributions. In order to ensure a level of internal validity, I invited a Continuous Improvement Officer to help me facilitate the focus group. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, because although having met the participants previously, I did not feel familiar with the organisational context having spent time talking about individual factors that shaped their views towards upward

communication. As a result, I felt there was a risk that I may not understand the significance of some of the things that the participants were telling me. Secondly, I could not be sure that the things the participants were telling me were an accurate reflection of organisational communication and I wanted some reassurance that I was receiving a realistic view of upward communication within the organisation.

Only one of the five Chief Inspectors turned up for the focus group, despite each of the participants having previously confirmed that they would be able to attend. This prevented the Chief Inspector focus group from taking place. Although it was not clear to me why the participants hadn't turned up, the Continuous Improvement Officer suggested that the competitiveness between them would likely have created an unwillingness to disclose any information in front of each other. These feelings of competitiveness were likely to have been driven by the promotion process, which would have resulted in peer-level colleagues viewing each other as competitors.

Focus groups are best suited to participants who are comfortable speaking openly in front of others (Basch, 1987). There was only one participant in my focus group who remained quiet throughout most of the focus group (MI6). The relationship I had built with him previously, having interviewed him, allowed me to approach him during a break and ask whether his views were the same or different to the group. We spent time discussing what had been said and he felt that the participants had been open and honest with their contributions, and that he agreed with what they had said.

The presence of others may prevent participants from sharing opinions and information which are useful to the researcher (Basch, 1987). In other words, avoiding controversial or sensitive topics. In order to counteract this effect, I asked the Continuous Improvement Officer after the end of the focus group if there were any major

themes that we hadn't had the chance to discuss, to which he replied no, providing me with reassurance that no important information had been deliberately withheld.

Furthermore, he validated that the themes that had been discussed were reflective of the current themes being discussed in the wider organisation.

From a facilitator point of view, having spent time with each participant previously discussing their personal views on voice and silence during the individual interviews, I had a greater understanding of the nature of upward communication and therefore the topics they were discussing with each other, than I would have done had I have run the focus groups first. The advantages of this were that I was more effective at eliciting responses and was able to ask relatively fewer clarification questions than I would have otherwise, preventing me from disrupting the flow of their natural conversation (Calder, 1977). From a participator point of view, a focus group removes pressure from individual respondents meaning that they feel less pressure and can more easily and freely contribute when they like (Basch, 1987).

Semi-structured interview

Each interview began with an open-ended question "Can you describe to me under what circumstances you usually talk to your superior/subordinate. e.g. when, where, why, how often?" As well as being a question designed to put the participant at ease, this provided valuable contextual information about the communication relationship between the superior and their subordinate. The interview schedules are contained in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5.

The next section will describe how the data were analysed.

5.4 Data Analysis

The previous sections in this chapter have highlighted that four methods were used in the present study; card sort, concurrent think-aloud, semi-structured interview, and focus group. The data from semi-structured interviews and concurrent think-aloud were analysed using thematic analysis. The card sort tables and focus group were summarised and used to provide additional support to themes raised through the thematic analysis. More detail is provided below of the data analysis processes.

Thematic Analysis

The qualitative analytic method used to analyse the data from the concurrent think-aloud and semi-structured interviews in the present study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be considered to be a process of identifying common ideas which appear to explain the phenomenon one is trying to understand. The themes can represent ideas presented by participants during interviews, conceptual topics developed by the researcher during a review of the data, descriptions of behaviour within a culture, or explanations for why something is happening (Saldana, 2009). Thematic analysis has also been described as pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The identification of patterns that appear in the data help the researcher to explain how the participants' responses are linked together in a meaningful way, allowing the production of a conceptual framework which supports interpretation of the data.

There are two types of thematic analysis: inductive and deductive (Bryman, 2012). The present study used an inductive data analysis, that is where the themes were derived from the data, rather than a more deductive approach where pre-determined themes were identified through the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive thematic analysis was

considered suitable for the present study owing to the exploratory nature of the research questions.

My data analysis strategy followed established guidelines laid out for interpretative research (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). In the first instance the transcribed data was read several times to ensure familiarity before comments were made in the left hand column to highlight basic ideas. At this stage the comments were purely descriptive. Once this had been done, the right hand column was then used to group the basic ideas together which represented the underlying experiences conveyed by the participant. This stage was the first attempt at interpretation and provided an insight into what their experiences meant from a psychological perspective. The final stage was to group the ideas into overarching themes.

In practice, I analysed the first interview and identified a number of codes. Then, I analysed the second interview to identify codes which matched the ones identified in the first interview. I also identified new codes at this stage too. All of the interviews were analysed one after the other by building on previous codes and revising existing ones as new codes emerged. This resulted in set of complete set of codes for all of the data. At the end of the data analysis stage, I had developed a coding book which contained descriptions for all first order codes and served as the basis for my data analysis.

Throughout my data analysis I experimented with a number of different methods of managing the data and codes. Following this initial manual data analysis stage, I needed a way in which to collate all excerpts that belonged to each code, and I did this using Nvivo 10 (later upgraded to Nvivo 11). Once I had allocated all of the raw data to the first order codes, I then started to validate and elucidate my research questions and identify which codes would be most likely to provide empirical support for each research question (Yin, 2009). However, when trying to move to second-order coding and interpretation, I felt that I was unable to see

similar data and codes at the same time, therefore losing sight of the overall story of my research. I found it more useful to export the codes and their data into Microsoft Excel from where I could see all of the data in the same place and start the process of interpretation by moving excerpts around according to themes to which they might belong.

I used second order codes as the first stage of interpretation (Blaikie, 2007). One way in which I tried to ensure that interpretation was still grounded in the participants' data was by using *invivo* codes as a second order codes where possible. For example, the code of "reputation" did not emerge as a first order code because it did not describe something relevant for a research question, but it acted perfectly as a way of understanding why promotion shaped the voice behaviour of participants.

I also used memo writing as a way of helping me to interpret the data. Charmaz (2006) suggested that memo-writing should take place as early as possible in the analysis process to prevent the researcher from jumping too early into second-stage coding. Also, memo-writing can help the writer to distinguish their own voice from that of the participants, thereby making the distinction between participant and researcher voices clear. I captured lots of memos from the initial manual data analysis stage, which proved very useful when trying to make sense of the data.

The final stage was that of creating themes. Smith, Harre and Van Langenhove (1995) highlighted that emergent themes were called such because the process was an iterative one of interpretation and sustained engagement with the data. The creation of themes is an attempt to create some order from the complexity of the data. By constantly checking between the data and the themes, it prevented me from drifting away from the original text, thereby making sure that interpretations were as close to explaining the original data as possible.

Card Sort Tables. The card sort activity was recorded using an audio device and the card placements were typed up into tables using Microsoft Word. There were two outputs for the card sort activity: the original card sort tables and the amended card sort tables. The results of the card sort tables and the amended card sort tables were collated into an Excel file. Where the participant had an amended card sort table, this was the one that was used for the data analysis as this was felt to be the most representative of the participants' views. The outputs of the concurrent think-aloud, known as Thinking Aloud Protocols (TAP), were transcribed and imported into Nvivo 10.

Focus Group. I made summary notes of the participant responses on a flip chart. I captured the notes myself rather than appointing a scribe because I knew that I would be analysing the data and felt it was important that I understood my notes thoroughly. Although Calder (1977) argued that extensive verbatim quotes from group members were important to demonstrate their experiences, I used the focus group to capture contextual influences and so I felt that a summary of the key influences was sufficient for my purpose. As discussed previously when describing the wider research design, and given this is a phenomenological piece of research, I was not intending for the results of the focus group to be generalisable outside of this group. The aim was to provide greater understanding into the responses provided by the participants in their individual interviews. The fact that it provided a greater insight into organisational factors than I had expected, would suggest a suitable method for use in the future.

5.5 Reflexivity On Data Analysis

The process of data coding proved to be one of the most difficult parts of my PhD journey. I had originally planned to follow a coding process, as described by Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1995) which comprised descriptive coding, followed by identification of interpretative codes, and finally creation of a number of themes.

However, my experience of data analysis did not mirror the calm and ordered process that I had read about.

The process of descriptive coding entailed a number of iterations before a set of descriptive codes were finalised. For example, following an initial descriptive coding process with the pilot data, I amended the descriptive codes following analysis of stage one data, and then again following the analysis of stage two data. Each reiteration of the codes required a time consuming recoding of the data to capture the changes.

The research questions also went through a number of iterations. For example, during the pilot data collection, the research question was “how do managers tap into informal networks to find out information?”, but I realised by the end of the pilot study that in order to study informality, it was necessary to define formality beforehand. Therefore, for stage one and two of the main data collection, the focus of the research questions was on defining formality. The process of refining the research questions was also responsible for some of the data re-coding above because with each set of new research questions came a search for new data to support the answer.

As the data analysis was inductive, all of the data had been descriptively coded so I ended up with a large number of codes. From the codes, I realised that I had the potential to answer eight research questions in total. I then had to decide which research questions were the most useful and for which I had the most supporting data. During this process, I was experiencing feelings of uncertainty and fear which caused me to question my data analysis strategy. Nowhere did it say that I was supposed to be scared of reading my data in case I saw something I hadn't seen before which would completely change my perspective. Nevertheless, following a series of conversations with my supervisors and a dogged determination to do an inductive analysis rather than a deductive one (which

would probably have been quicker), I arrived at the main research question and the two sub research questions that were used for the present study.

Following finalisation of the research questions, I needed to generate interpretative codes which attempted to explain the processes and systems underpinning the descriptive codes. In order to ensure the interpretative codes were based on theories in the voice and silence field, I engaged with the voice and silence literature at this stage to identify the types of concepts and theories for which I should be looking. Once engaged with the literature, I started to notice other things in the data which I hadn't noticed before. As a result, I had to re-code some of my data so that it better supported the new research questions.

I am not sure how representative my experience of data analysis is when compared to someone else's. From a reflexive perspective, I suggest that my desire to be assiduous in everything I do led me to spend more time on generation of codes and themes than others may have. This was driven by a desire to ensure that I represented the participant responses as closely as possible to the way they had relayed them to me. Having spoken to others who generated codes and themes in a matter of days and weeks, my 19-month data analysis process from January 2015 to September 2016 could be considered excessive, but I am not sure I could have done this any differently whilst still ensuring that my data was aligned completely with both the literature and the participant data. Having said that, following completion of the data analysis and writing up of the thesis, I stumbled across a paper which described a similar experience of analysis to mine. The paper by Braun and Clarke (2006) described almost perfectly the trials and tribulations that I had experienced, suggesting that my experience has not been unusual.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted that four methods were used which were designed to provide different perspectives of how perceived formality might shape upward challenge. Following data collection, thematic analysis was used to interpret and make sense of the data in order to provide insight into the research questions. Chapter Seven will present the findings using a conceptual model to show how the themes and codes relate to the research questions being explored.

Chapter Six Findings

This chapter will present the findings for the main research question, how does perceived formality shape upward challenge? In order to do that, the literature review identified that it was important to establish a working definition of formality before being able to draw conclusions about how formality shapes upward challenge. Therefore, the first section of this findings chapter will present the definitions of formality concerning relationship with superior and communication. Once these definitions have been established, the second section of this findings chapter will present a conceptual model that explains how upward challenge appears to be shaped by formality.

Figure 2 shows the key themes that were used to understand how the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews, card sort activity and focus group were linked to each other and to the research questions. The top row in the figure indicates the research questions and the columns underneath the top row represent the emergent themes which highlighted the key considerations when attempting to understand how formality shaped upward challenge.

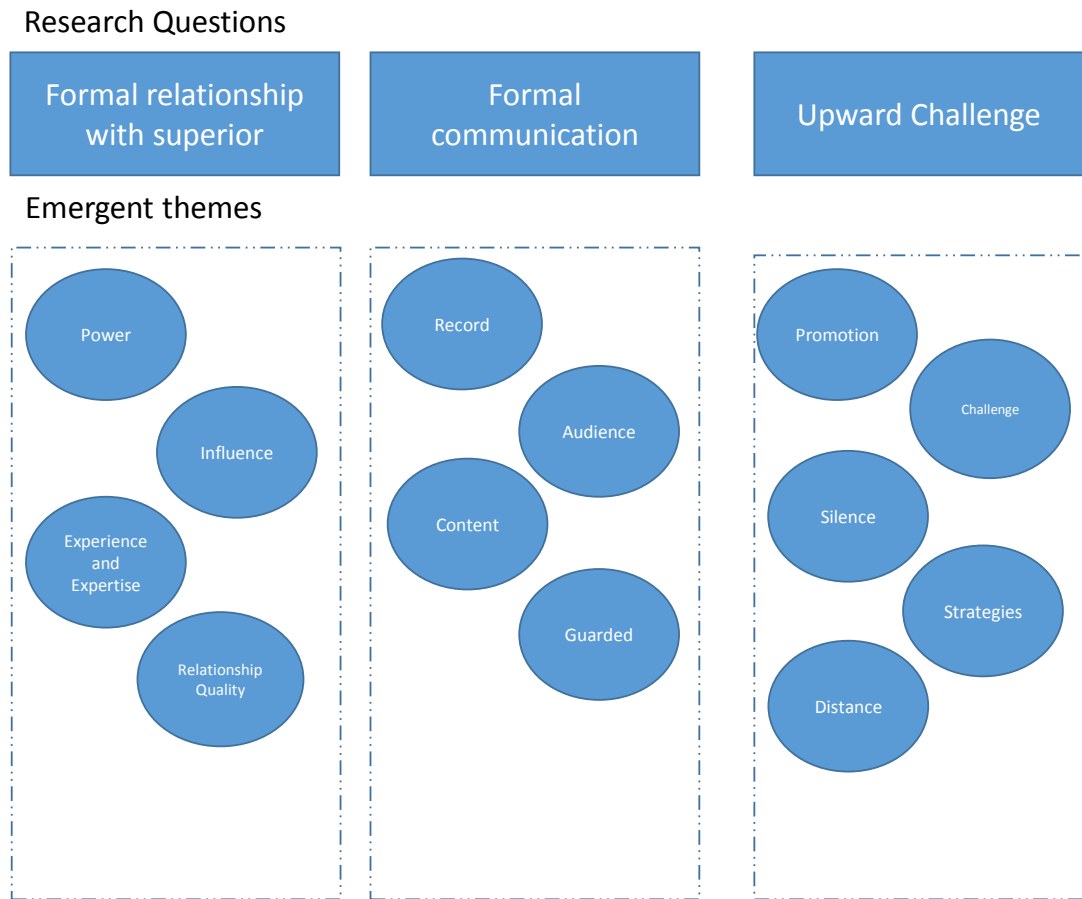


Figure 2. Key themes emerging from the data analysis process

The data analysis process identified a number of themes which represented the way in which the participants defined formality. With regards to formal relationship with superior, four themes were identified. *Power* reflected the authority that a superior had that allowed them to enforce action when necessary; *relationship quality* described the nature of the relationship in terms of poor, good or excellent; *influence* reflected the greater influence the superior had because of their wider exposure to senior level officers; and *experience and expertise* reflected the main reason why subordinates did not always feel less powerful than their superiors. With regards to formal communication, four themes were also identified. Three of the themes, record, audience and content were used to differentiate formal communication from informal communication. *Record* represented the documentable nature

of the channel; *audience* referred to the other participants present at the time and whether the individual knew them or not, and *content* referred to the work-related or personal nature of the information being discussed. The fourth theme, *guarded*, described the cautious way in which participants shared information using formal communication channels, highlighting the risk associated with challenging a superior.

The next stage of the data analysis process was to understand how perceived formality, as defined above, shaped upward challenge. Five themes were identified. The themes of *challenge* and *silence* identified that some officers described how they did challenge but others described how they did not challenge their superior. The theme of *strategies* identified that those who did challenge their superior used a number of strategies. The strategies appeared to represent a form of risk mitigation, to reduce the risk associated with upward challenge identified during the theme *guarded*. Risk was mainly associated with the theme of *promotion*, which appeared to be based on a recognition that the superior had the power and influence to prevent career progression if the officer acted inappropriately. Finally, the theme of *distance* represented the way in which the organisation design was likely to have contributed towards perceptions of formality by restricting interaction between officers and their superiors, particularly at the levels of Inspector and Chief Inspector.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 3 should be read from left to right starting with *disagreement*. It starts with the officer hearing about a decision with which they disagree and reflects that they then make a decision to challenge or remain silent. The model highlights the importance of promotion in shaping the decision between challenge and silence. Moving to the top half of the model, the strategies that are then used by those who challenge are likely to be shaped by the nature of the relationship with the superior and formal communication. Distance is shown as likely to shape perceptions of formality. Risk, although not a theme as it was better represented by an *invivo* code, *guarded*, can be viewed

in upward challenge situations where there is a formal relationship with superior and using formal communication.

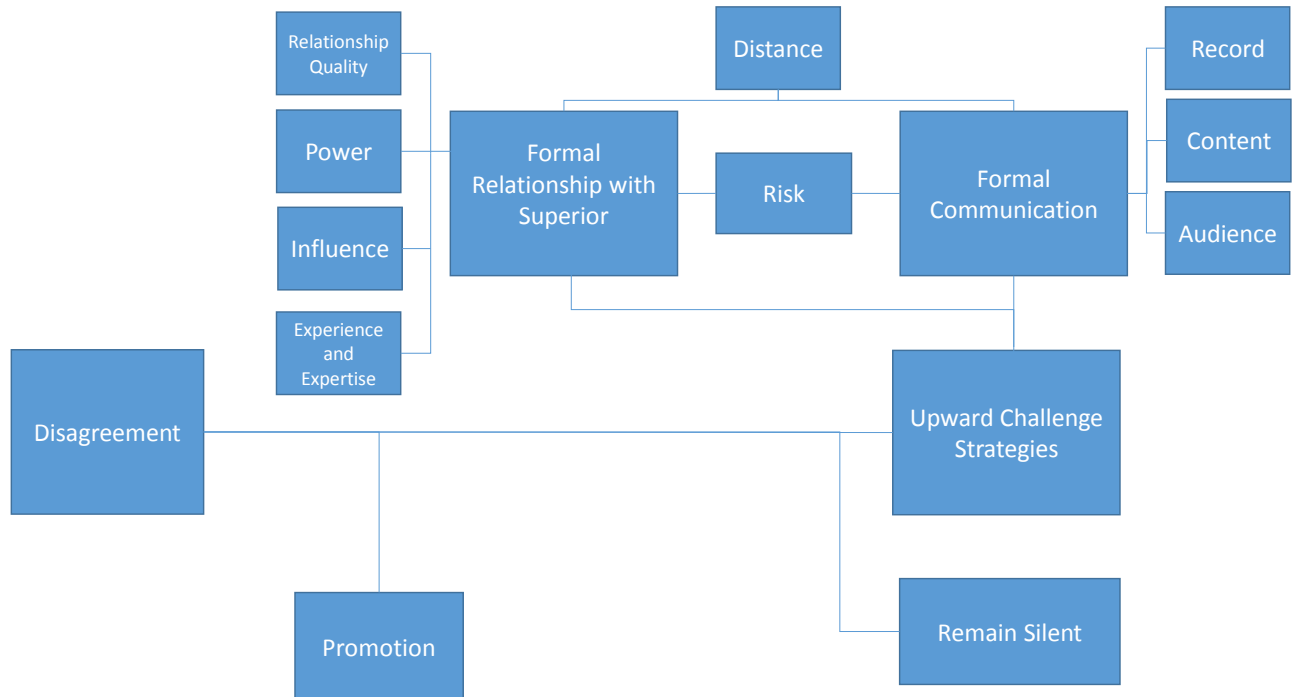


Figure 3. Proposed Conceptual Model Showing How Perceived Formality Shapes Upward Challenge.

This chapter is presented as follows. Firstly, definitions of formal relationship with superior and formal communication are presented. Secondly, the factors that shape a decision to challenge or remain silent are explained. Finally, five upward challenge strategies are identified and the way that formal relationship and formal communication appear to shape upward challenge are highlighted.

6.1 Defining Formal Relationship with Superior

As explained in the literature review, there is a growing interest amongst voice and silence scholars in the nature of relationships that subordinates have with their superiors and how these shape an individuals' propensity to voice or be silent. Much of the empirical evidence has

focused on the ways in which superiors encourage voice. These studies have identified that superiors who encourage voice are considered to be open and approachable, good listeners and trustworthy. However, the elements of a relationship with superior that do not encourage voice have received less empirical attention.

The present study attempted to understand how perceptions of a formal relationship with superior shaped upward challenge. It was felt that establishing a working definition of the formal aspects of the relationship with superior was important when considering upward challenge before being able to draw any conclusions about the effects of formality. Therefore, research question 2.1 attempted to define the formal aspects of a relationship with superior. As the literature review demonstrated there were two ways in which a formal relationship with superior could be defined; power differences and relationship quality. The data in this section are mainly derived from the semi-structured interviews with additional contextual understanding provided by the focus group. Two themes emerged from the data that highlighted formality and its importance for upward challenge: power and influence.

Power. Participants recognised that their relationship with their superior was ultimately a formal one. This formality was defined by the fact that the superior was recognised as more powerful. Power to the participants represented the ability for the superior to make decisions and enforce action. One Constable explained that sometimes the decisions made by the superior were not to be challenged.

Like, if she'd told me she wanted me to be doing something and it wants doing today, I'd do it. Likewise, you know, if we're in the public order van and she says we're out now, we're going out now, and stuff like that, I'd do it (MPC3).

All participants understood that alongside the ability to make decisions and issue instructions, the superior also had the right to enforce action where necessary. Participants

explained that the formality of the superior role engendered respect for superiors and that officers would carry out instructions if required to do so: “I’m a very big believer in the hierarchy because if somebody’s ultimately responsible like he is for the district, then he has every right to expect me to do as I’m instructed” (MCI2). However, the nature of the activities for which the officers expected to be told what to do by their superior changed as they became more senior. One Chief Inspector explained that their superior, a Superintendent, would set the strategic direction of the department, as opposed to the assignment of day to day activities as described above by MPC3: “In his ability to direct tactics, you know, and ultimately it’s his call.” (MCI1)

The power differentials that were experienced by different ranks of officer and their superior were further highlighted by another Chief Inspector who explained that there was little expectation that Inspectors and above would need to be told what to do to the same extent as Sergeants and Constables, suggesting that the formal nature of the relationship with the superior might be different at different levels of the organisation.

Although at the end of the day the ... Chief Superintendent, can simply turn around and tell a Superintendent what to do, that tends not to happen quite as overtly, whereas an Inspector will tell a Sergeant, and a Sergeant will tell a PC what to do (MCI2).

However, one Chief Inspector explained that it was unlikely that an officer and their direct line superior would be constantly reminded of the formal differences between themselves. He believed that the nature of their roles meant that they were more familiar with each other because they worked closely together.

Realistically speaking, when you’re a PC if you were to speak to an Inspector you’d be conscious of it. If you’re a PC speaking to a Sergeant, no, not really, because a Sergeant’s pretty much your mate, you’re that level and it’s like, they work with you,

they see you day to day. So if I was to, I know it sounds really daft but that works all the way up, right (MCI3).

It is suggested here that power differences between officers and their superiors underpinned perceptions of formality and that the awareness of power differences was different at different levels of the rank structure. However, at all levels of the organisation, the power enjoyed by superiors provided them with the opportunity to make decisions, issue instructions and enforce action where necessary, thereby making them a figure worthy of respect.

Experience and Expertise. Despite the fact that officers identified power differentials as the formal difference between themselves and their superiors, participants made it clear that they did not feel less powerful than their superior all of the time. In fact, there were situations when they felt more powerful. Whilst analysing the data on power to understand the situations when participants were likely to feel more powerful, a theme of experience and expertise emerged.

One area in which participants felt more powerful was in their relationships with their direct reports which meant that they were able to get things done which they did not believe the superior would be able to do so effectively. One Inspector explained that he was able to feel powerful by considering his ability to make things happen underneath him:

I think it depends on the situation, definitely, or the context of that, because if he's present, say at a briefing or, you know, in a particular role as the sort of next commander up then yes I would, because it's, again, the rank structure. If he gives a task or a set of directions or an instruction and you go away and you've got your team as well, or you're feeding back, then, no I don't think I feel less powerful at all (MI4).

Another situation where participants described feeling more powerful tended to be where they had experience or expertise that was valued by their superior. One Chief Inspector

described how her expertise of local criminals had proved invaluable in a number of high profile cases which earned her respect from her superior:

...I've got 22 years' police service in, and every single, every single day, it's been in [the same force]. So I bring with me a lot of credibility in terms of policing in [name of force], and that is absolutely I feel that that is acknowledged within the command team (MC11).

Another Inspector explained that helping her superior to understand an area of policing in which her superior had very little knowledge prevented her from feeling that their relationship was predominantly characterised by a power imbalance:

In my field of work, so my Chief Inspector's been in her role for one year, having previously been in CID and then on a career break. So actually she's absolutely new to neighbourhood policing [SNT], and is, and she's the sort of person that is happy to be guided and me to explain things and, so no, I don't feel that she's got more power, because I know that she's happy to rely on my experience (MI8).

Most of the participants in this study were both subordinates and superiors and so were able to talk about what it was like being both subordinate and superior in different situations. From a managerial perspective, the Inspectors explained that they recognised that their role as a superior within the organisation provided them with feelings of power, but they were keen to point out that they were happy to defer to others where they recognised that others had more experience. However, another Inspector explained that despite allowing Sergeants and Constables to feed in suggestions which led to a stronger team because officers felt more valued when they felt that their views were considered, she also pointed out that the nature of policing was often top-down and so that opportunity to allow officers to have their say might not be as frequent as they would have liked:

And people don't like being told what to do. Particularly, I mean we get on with it more often than not because a lot of the job is about, you do as you're told. And we've got lots of policies and procedures in place and it's difficult to step outside of those. But where there is opportunity for staff to do that, then it's an ideal opportunity to give them some power, to go and do some things (MI3).

In summary, the power differentials which characterised a formal relationship between officers and their superiors were not present all of the time. In some situations, where officers had more experience and expertise in particular areas, the officers described feeling more powerful than their superior. The previous section showed that a formal relationship with superior was likely to be felt most in situations where the superior used their authority to enforce action. However, in situations where the officer was providing advice and guidance to the superior because they had more experience or expertise, the relationship with the superior would have likely felt less formal.

Influence. When trying to understand the importance of the power differentials that defined a formal relationship with superior, a second theme emerged: influence. This theme highlighted that power gave superiors a greater level of influence than their officers because of their exposure at a more senior level.

I would say he's making decisions at a higher level and he's involved in different meetings and groups, And what's going on at a more strategic level about you know, sort of how people are dealt with in the community that have got mental health problems and things like that. ... he is attending higher level meetings and has got greater ability than me to influence what's happening (MI7).

This level of influence was most salient to officers when they considered that their superiors had the ability to influence the direction of their careers. For example:

... the problem we've got is our organisation as I said to you is very hierarchical. And you disagree with the wrong people and you can probably say goodbye to wherever you're going anywhere again. To be quite honest. And to say that doesn't happen, it does happen (MI2).

The link between influence afforded by having greater power and seniority was highlighted by one Inspector who explained that superiors had the opportunity to curtail career development opportunities if the officer made themselves unfavourable to the superior:

It's still rank-orientated, you've still got a power thing, you've still got to be careful, it's always...oh, just watch out for that..., just mark his card. And there's always that feeling that even if you're not going for a promotion you might want a job, sideways move or something (MI5).

Another Chief Inspector highlighted that challenging upwards involved making oneself vulnerable which was considered to be risky because the superior could use the opportunity to influence others' perceptions of the officers' suitability for promotion.

...sometimes you can be, you can open yourself up to say, I'm really annoyed or I'm really frustrated or I don't agree with something that's happening, and you open yourself up knowing or trusting that individual is then not going to use that in a way that might hinder your future career or might hinder your professional, you know, what people think of you professionally (MCI3).

During the Inspector focus group, there was much discussion about the importance of the promotion process for shaping the way that officers challenged their superiors. The Inspectors explained that anyone above the rank of Sergeant was expected to aim for promotion, but that in order to be successful, it was necessary to avoid rocking the boat and focus on keeping their

heads below the parapet. In other words, there was an expectation that a successful officer would not draw attention to themselves by challenging a superior and earning a reputation as a troublemaker. One Inspector, who decided to remain at Inspector level, emphasised the benefits that she experienced when challenging a superior once she had stepped off the “promotion treadmill”.

I can be, I am a lot freer to be honest...I’m not bothered about internal politics, whereas I would have to be bothered about internal politics on that promotion path... I wouldn’t have felt perhaps as free enough to say that if I was seeking promotion.... Because you might be criticising ideas from those that are in, have that position of power to promote you (MI8).

Relationship Quality. The literature review identified that the second way in which a formal relationship with superior could be recognised was the quality of the relationship that participants perceived that they had with their superior. Therefore, during the interviews, the first question I asked participants was to describe the relationship they had with their superior. This was an open question designed to explore whether participants would describe the relationship they had with their superior as formal or informal. I felt that the extent to which officers described their relationship as formal or informal might provide insight into whether formality was a concept with which the participants were familiar. However, I was very surprised to find that only one of the 19 participants referred to formality by describing their relationship as informal. Furthermore, most of the participants appeared to have good relationships with their superior. For example, descriptors included “excellent”, “very good”, “symbiotic”, “good” and “quite good”. In fact, only one out of the 19 participants appeared to have a poor relationship with their superior, whom he described as a “buffoon”. This led me to conclude that participants did not consider their relationship with their superior to be

predominantly based on power differences, but predominantly on the type of relationship that they had with each other on a personal level.

Whilst exploring what a formal relationship with their superior meant to the participants, two additional aspects of relationship with a superior were highlighted by participants that were important when considering upward challenge: rank and personality. Rank emphasised the power differences that characterised the participants' relationship with their superior. Personality referred to the extent that a superior appeared open to challenge: "OK, there's a rank thing there and then there's a personality thing, don't forget because you're talking in the abstract about rank and the big thing is, how open and honest is that individual? How approachable is that individual?" (MI5). As I started to explore more deeply the difference between how officers perceived a relationship based on power and one based on personality, I discovered that where an officer had a good relationship with their superior, they were less likely to be aware of the power differences between them.

Many of the participants explained to me that good relationships often took time to develop and good relationship was characterised by high levels of trust between them. "Probably with my previous Chief Inspector, I worked with for a long time, we had a very very close relationship, because we'd built that trust up over a long time." (MI2). In a similar way, not knowing someone meant that you didn't automatically trust them: "if you don't really know them, it can be difficult to know whether you can trust those sorts of people" (MI3).

Where a participant had had a long relationship with her superior, she explained that such relationships could be described as informal:

We've got quite an informal relationship because we've known each other for many years, we were both based at a police station in [S] twenty years ago, so I know her personally as well as professionally (MI8).

One Inspector who had better relationships with his Sergeants than with his Chief Inspector, explained that until you developed trust in someone, the power differences were much more noticeable: “I would put it down to trust, confidence, time to develop a relationship, you cannot...these things here, this rank thing demands respect straightaway” (MI5).

When considering upward challenge, participants explained that having a good relationship with a superior was much more conducive to challenge. For example, one Chief Inspector explained that his Inspector challenged him frequently because they had known each other for a long time.

And there’s an over-familiarity there because I’ve known him for a long time, and I would say we’re good personal friends. We don’t go out drinking and anything like that, but we’re good, we are friendly if that makes sense. I think that breaks down some of the barriers, so he probably wouldn’t do it [challenge] quite the same with somebody he didn’t know as well, but he would still do it (MCI2).

Participants also provided a number of examples where their superior had not necessarily welcomed challenge.

And when I, the relationship I have, if I have to say anything very critical, he doesn’t take criticism lightly. He gets very defensive. So if you gave some feedback and you give it very diplomatically, I’m not sure whether he’d pick up on the diplomacy part of it, he’d just see it as a positive or negative rather than, oh, I’ll take that as a gift, yeah, perhaps I could have done that differently, or maybe I did come across that way, a little bit harsh, or...he’s not that sort of a guy (MI5).

In summary, a formal relationship with superior was defined by the presence of power differences and an awareness that a superior could use their influence to shape career progression.

Despite the fact that poor relationship quality with superior was also identified in the literature as a formal relationship, participants described having a good relationship with their superiors. Therefore, it appeared that it was possible to have a formal relationship with superior in terms of awareness of power differences on the one hand, and on the other hand a good relationship characterised by trust which had built up over time. Where trust existed, officers appeared to feel less concerned about challenging upwards because they trusted their superior not to use their power and influence negatively over their career development.

6.2 Defining Formal Communication

The second type of formality explored in the present study was that of formal communication. As discussed in the literature review, communication has traditionally been defined by categorising channels as formal or informal. However, with the advent of computers, the distinction between formal and informal communication has become less clear, with the characteristics traditionally associated with each overlapping. In order to understand how formality shapes upward challenge, research question 2.2 attempted to establish a working definition of formal communication.

The findings in this section are derived from the card sort activity and the thinking-aloud protocols (TAPs). The findings are presented in three parts. The first part presents the categorisation of formal and informal channels to highlight similarities and differences in the way that participants viewed the formality of communication channels. The second part presents a number of characteristics which were used to define formal communication. The final part explains that risk was associated with having a conversation using a formal communication channel.

Perceptions of formality by channel. The aim of the card sort activity was to identify how participants defined formal and informal communication in order to understand

how participants might recognise when they were having a formal conversation with a superior. In the first instance, a comparison of the card sort categorisations across all participants was carried out to establish if there was a consistent view of formal and informal communication channels. Table 10 shows the results of the card sort analysis. The left hand column indicates channel. The top row denotes the four ranks included in the study, increasing in seniority from left to right. Each grey square denotes that all participants of that rank identified that channel as formal.

Table 10. *Formal communication channels agreed upon by all participants by rank*

| Channel | PC | S | I | CI |
|----------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Grievance Procedure | | | | |
| Talk-through radio | | | | |
| Video conference (DMM) | | | | |
| Appraisal review | | | | |
| Twitter Post | | | | |
| Scheduled meetings group | | | | |
| Daybook | | | | |
| Monthly Management Meeting | | | | |
| Email | | | | |
| Morning Briefing | | | | |

With regards to formal communication channels, the findings showed that out of 11 channels ranked by all participants, only three channels were identified as formal by all of the participants at all four ranks: Grievance Procedure, Talk-through radio and Video Conference (DMM). It was also possible to see that the most senior group of participants agreed upon formal communication channels more often than those at lower levels. With

regards to informal channels, there was no agreement of channels across any of the participants meaning that channels categorised as informal do not appear in Table 10.

Characteristics of Formal Communication

In order to understand how participants determined whether a channel was formal or informal, the thinking aloud protocols (TAP) allowed insight into the way that participants distinguished between them. Through this exercise it became clear that participants did not always identify formality based on communication channel. A thematic analysis of the TAPs resulted in the identification of three themes highlighting characteristics of communication that helped participants to decide between formal and informal communication; record, content and audience.

Record. This theme reflected the fact that anything for which there was a record, whether it contained either a summary or the full message, was perceived of as formal. For example, “the formal are all recorded things, so like this is all, goes on record, your appraisal, scheduled meetings, grievance, that’s what on record” (MPC1). All participants were in agreement that if there was an organisational record of the communication, this meant that the conversation would be classed as formal. One Constable explained why a record made something formal:

Talk-through radio. It’s all recorded, and I’d treat it as being formal, and in cases of really serious incidents and stuff, tapes are pulled, you know, can be revealed to the press et cetera, involving court cases et cetera, and we’ve got to talk about serious stuff (MPC3).

Some of the more senior participants highlighted that a record also signified formality because this meant that the information could be used to provide an audit trail. Audit trails were useful for individual officers where evidence may be required that

something has been said, or where documentation was required to prove a sequence of events. The benefits of having an audit trail were identified by one Inspector who explained that the organisation has developed a reliance on email because of the security that it provided:

It's because there's an audit trail, and that is exactly what it is. And I think it's rife throughout the organisation, both upwards and downwards, but we've got far too much reliance on email and everybody wanting to, in inverted commas, cover their back so that there's something documented that I've dealt with something and sent it on (MI4).

Another benefit of record was that without it, evidence in support of crimes could be classed as inadmissible, as explained by one Chief Inspector: "there's a basic rule, certainly in critical incident management, if it's not written down or they haven't got a record for it, it didn't happen....that's what the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] bouncers tell us" (MCI5).

However, where necessary, participants also explained that a personal record in writing might be sufficient to act as a record in some circumstances. Organisational records were those generated by IT systems, for example email or talk-through radio transactions. On the other hand, personal records were those kept by the individual themselves. For example, an entry in a pocketbook or a daybook following a telephone call.

Telephone call, same again, if it's just one of my staff calling me to ask me something, to let me know something, it's informal. But sometimes if it's somebody not happy about something and they're wanting, I need to record it, I'd

make a note in my daybook or things like that that I've recorded it, it would go formal (MPS2).

The daybook was a formal document in that it could be called for evidence if required as one Inspector explained:

It's a confidential book but there will be instances, where this is investigations or grievances or any other issues, whereby whatever you recorded is disclosable so again, it's about being...you must be careful what you write in it and it needs to be auditable, accountable... so everything in there is audit trailable (MI3).

The keeping of a personal record signified that even though a channel may have been used which did not create an organisational record, where a personal record was kept, the conversation could still be classed as formal by the participant. The theme of record highlighted that any record of the conversation, organisational or personal, could represent formality.

Content. This theme highlighted that a channel could be categorised as formal or informal depending upon the nature of the information that passed through it. One of the ways the participants used to decide if something was formal or informal was whether the content of the message appeared to be work-related or not. For example, one Constable said "Yes, everything in work is formal, when you're talking about a job. Everything's formal because it's somebody else's problem that you're helping deal with" (MPC1). The same Constable gave an example of when a conversation could be classed as informal. "Whereas it could just be, like I said, chat about the Christmas do that makes it informal" (MPC1).

However, participants explained that trying to identify whether a conversation was formal or informal based on the content was not always possible until the conversation

had started, highlighting the difficulty some participants had with categorising formal and informal in the card sort without a specific context in which to place it.

Coming into my office unannounced, it depends what they want to talk about.

They might want to talk about a football match last night, or they might want to talk about the fact that they're being bullied, or they've got issues. So that could be either [formal or informal] (MPS3).

One Inspector highlighted how despite a conversation appearing to start off informally, the nature of the subsequent content could mean a change from informal to formal, something he referred to as the "tipping point":

My first instinct would be to put it down as informal, because I have contact with all of them every single day That will change depending on the topic and if it's, again, a welfare, discipline, or some other issue, or something that needs dealing with quick time, it can easily change to formal (MI4).

A channel could therefore be classed as both formal and informal, depending on the information being passed through the channel at a particular time. For example, one Sergeant said, about a telephone call:

It depends on who you're speaking to and what you're speaking about, because essentially it's somebody communicating with you, but it doesn't necessarily mean that if somebody's contacting you via telephone call, whether it's formal or informal, it depends on the context of what they're speaking to you (MPS1).

The theme of content emphasised that perceptions of formality were influenced by the nature of the information being passed through the channel. Predominantly, conversations about work were likely to be classed as formal because of the serious nature of many of the problems that they dealt with.

Audience. This theme reflected the fact that most participants were mindful of the audience to whom the information would be communicated, and depending on who the audience were would depend on whether the channel was categorised as formal or informal. There were a number of channels which were categorised as formal because of the unknown or large audience who might have access to the information shared on it. One of them was described by a Constable: “Talk through radio. Again, this is a formal way of communicating, reason being is everyone’s listening to you” (MPC2).

A number of scheduled meetings were used within the UKPS to disseminate information. On balance, most participants thought that scheduled group meetings tended to refer to those meetings where those outside of their immediate team were involved. For example, 17 out of the 19 participants categorised scheduled group meetings as formal because these were usually meetings where attendees were from outside of their immediate team and unlikely to be known to them. The importance of audience therefore appeared to be about knowing the officers in a personal capacity and being able to speak openly to them:

You’re not going to turn up at a meeting where you don’t know all of the people, you may know some, but you’re not going to have that relationship with these people where you can talk and make it informal (MPS1).

The theme of audience highlighted that formality was likely to be determined where there were people in attendance who were unknown to the participants or from outside of their immediate team. Officers may have felt less able to speak openly and honestly in front of people that they didn’t know personally.

Example of How Characteristics Shape Perceptions of Formal Communication

Only three channels were described as formal by all the participants, Grievance Procedure, Video-Conference DMM and Talk-Through radio, indicating the variability in perspectives of formal communication channels that participants appeared to have. Furthermore, as the participants increased in rank, they perceived more formality. Reasons for this variability were highlighted where formal communication was found to be defined by three characteristics, record, content and audience. This section will give examples of two channels to illustrate how the same channel can be perceived differently depending upon the characteristics that were important at that time.

Morning Briefing. At all ranks above Sergeant, most participants categorised Morning Briefing as formal. However, at the lower levels, there were a range of different views as can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11. *Categorisation of Morning Briefing*

| Formal | Informal | Inbetween |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| MPS3 | MPC3 | MPC1 |
| MI1 | MPS2 | MPC2 |
| MI3 | | MPS1 |
| MI8 | | MI7 |
| MI2 | | MI6 |
| MI4 | | |
| MI5 | | |
| MCI1 | | |
| MCI2 | | |
| MCI3 | | |
| MCI4 | | |
| MCI5 | | |

The reasons behind the variability in categorisation of Morning Briefing can be explained by looking at two themes: content and audience.

Content. Despite the range of categorisations at the levels of Constable and Sergeant, all participants agreed that the content of Morning Briefing was always formal:

It's a formal thing such as that the business that we're talking about is serious stuff and I need to be able to be happy that the staff are informed with everything that they need to equip them to go and patrol (MPS3).

However, as can be seen from Table 11, at Inspector and Chief Inspector level, there was more consistent categorisation focused on the formal nature of the Morning Briefing. This was largely owing to the fact that although participants at these levels recognised the informal elements, they felt that the formal purpose of the meeting was the most important element to be emphasised. However, it was also recognised that Morning Briefing consisted of other formal and informal elements, indicating that categorisation was determined by the element participants thought was most important.

Whereas, the Morning Briefing was a time enjoyed by the Police Constables and Sergeants for catching up with colleagues, the Inspectors and Chief Inspectors felt that the informal elements were separate from the meeting itself:

At every tasking that you go to, it always follows the same, the same thing. I suppose that once they've finished, and half of you get up and everybody stays in and has a cup of tea and it then becomes informal (MI3).

It could be that because the Inspectors and Chief Inspectors did not routinely attend the Morning Briefings with their Sergeants and Constables, it allowed them to see more clearly the official reason for the meeting, highlighting its main focus as work-related.

Audience. The audience at the meeting shaped views of whether it became a formal or informal channel. For example, it was recognised that the meeting was informal when surrounded by the people that the participants worked with regularly: “I suppose it is formal, but the setup is informal, you’re with your group having a cup of tea first thing” (MPC1). In a similar way, one thing that led to the Morning Briefing being classed as formal was the presence of people outside of the participants’ normal working area. One Sergeant demonstrated this rationale. “A Morning Briefing when it’s not your team, there’s a rank structure and there’s other departments involved. Then that’s when it would go in the formal pile” (MPS2). It is important to note that MPS2 identified Morning Briefing as informal in the card sort activity, providing further support that categorisations of communication channels were likely shaped by multiple factors.

Summary. This section has shown that the difference in categorisation between formal, informal and inbetween for Morning Briefing appears to have been determined by the element of the Morning Briefing that the participant primarily focused on: content or audience. It appeared that Inspectors and Chief Inspectors, who were unlikely to attend the meeting regularly, focused on the more formal aspects of the briefing, whereas those who took part daily, Sergeants and Constables, focused on the more relaxed informal style of the meeting. The next example of Point to Point radio helps to explain the reason for the varied findings in the card sort activity by using the themes record and content to illustrate how even within the same rank, officers had different perceptions of formality.

Point to Point radio. There was much disagreement over whether Point to Point was formal or informal, with almost equal numbers of participants choosing each category as shown in Table 12. In contrast to Morning Briefing, all ranks used all categorisations.

Table 12. *Categorisation of Point to Point radio by all ranks*

| Formal | Informal | Inbetween |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| MPS1 | MPC1 | MPC2 |
| MPS3 | MPC3 | MI2 |
| MI1 | MPS2 | MI3 |
| MI6 | MI4 | MI5 |
| MI8 | MCI4 | MI7 |
| MCI1 | | MCI2 |
| MCI3 | | |
| MCI5 | | |

Record. One of the criteria that might have led participants to classify Point to Point as formal would have been the organisational recording of the conversations. However, there was a level of confusion over whether Point to Point was recorded or not. For example, one Chief Inspector didn't think it was. "Point to Point on the radio..., it's not recorded" (MCI1). Yet others felt it was. "It's got a huge server it goes through and saves everything." (MPS3) and "Point to Point radio, that's formal because it's recorded" (MCI3). Another Sergeant had categorised Point to Point as informal even though she conceded that she thought the conversations might be recorded. She explained "they're recorded somewhere but not to be used" (MPS2). The reason conversations were normally recorded by the organisation was so that the communication could be used as evidence in cases where action had not been taken or substantiation of the conversation could be produced if possible. However, in the case of Point to Point, MPS2 explained that she had never known Point to Point conversations to be used as evidence and therefore felt that the channel was more informal.

Audience. One thing that became clear when looking at the way in which Point to Point had been categorised, was that underpinning the theme, record, was a concern with what would happen to those recordings. If there was a record, there was a chance that others may hear about the conversation that took place. However, if there is no record, the conversation has a greater likelihood of remaining private. In the case of Point to Point, whether the participant believed the conversation to be recorded would therefore have affected the nature of the information they disclosed. One Chief Inspector, who didn't think that Point to Point conversations were recorded, emphasised the advantages of having a private conversation using this channel:

I tend to find you use Point to Point to have a more candid conversation because it's private and it's not recorded, and if someone's done something bloody stupid and needs challenging, you'd use Point to Point and say, what are you playing at? (MCI2).

Presented with the opportunity of not worrying who else will overhear the conversation, this participant explained how he was able to speak openly and honestly to his direct reports. This would suggest that participants did not feel able to have open and honest conversations using channels that were recorded.

Content. One Chief Inspector felt that Point to Point could only ever be formal because the channel was designed for operational purposes and therefore it must be used only for work-related conversations. "I don't consider airwave as a chat forum. It's there for a business purpose, so it goes in that one [formal]" (MCI5). One Inspector highlighted that one reason for different categorisations could be dependent upon the fact that things can change from informal to formal depending on the content of the conversation and how this develops over the course of the conversation: "Point to Point radio, again I'd put that as informal at the

start, but we have mentioned, depending on that tipping point it could become formal if you started to give instructions or information, advice on a particular incident” (MI4).

Based on the above examples, it would appear that Point to Point received such a variation of categorisations because participants categorised channels based on different criteria: record and content. The examples of Morning Briefing showed that there appeared to be a difference in perceptions of formality between upper and lower ranks involved in this study whereas Point to Point showed there were differences even within the same ranks.

Guarded

Throughout the course of the interviews, I became aware that there were certain risks associated with using formal communication owing to the characteristics identified earlier: record, content and audience. One word that appeared to represent the way that formal communication caused them to act was *guarded*. This section highlights the risks associated with formal communication and attempts to define what guarded meant to the participants.

One Chief Inspector explained that the act of having to write down some information in an exchange with his superior made him more guarded, simply because it could not be disputed once it was committed to email. There would be an audit trail. He contrasted this with a telephone conversation where there was no audit trail:

People will be guarded because There’s no debate that you wrote down XYZ.

Whereas in a phone call conversation, I mean, you remember the general principles of the conversation, but unless it’s a specific phrase that stands out, the exact details would perhaps be... (MCI2).

The fact that some channels always provided an organisational record of exchanges, caused participants to be mindful of what they used those particular channels for, as

described by one Sergeant:

It's communication for work, and you shouldn't really be using it unless it's communication in work, because there are things and issues round it that it's recorded, and so you wouldn't use it for informal chats or just talking to each other (MPS1).

Further analysis uncovered that guarded meant that the people liked to feel in control of the information that is known and circulated about them, and being guarded meant that they were careful with whom they shared all or some of the information so that they felt more in control of the information.

As a result of the unequivocality of formal communication, many people explained that being guarded had become a way of life for them and they had become used to watching what they said. For example, one Chief Inspector described how he had become well practised at thinking what he was going to say before he said it, to prevent any unfortunate incidents where things were repeated which caused him embarrassment:

It's like DMM in some respects...., when I'm chairing it I produce a quick summary of it. It can be slightly more informal on the tone if I know everyone around it, like I say, but generally it's something which I would expect, I'd feel comfortable about somebody else listening in on that I wasn't aware of (MCI5).

Many of the communication channels that officers used to communicate with their superiors were formal. One in particular which was a prevalent form of communication was email. One Chief Inspector explained that formal communication was able to be viewed by others and used to hold officers to account for what they'd said:

Email is formal, because it's an audit record, I'll be doing it in a work email one way or the other. The tone can still be informal occasionally, but it's there, I fully expect

that someone can reproduce it and I can be accountable to anything put in there (MCI5).

Furthermore, one Inspector explained that there was a greater opportunity for misunderstandings to occur when communicating using email, causing her to spend much more time writing emails to ensure that she didn't offend anyone:

I'm always very careful when I send emails about how the other person's going to perceive it. Sometimes because I work shifts, I have to send emails to people when I don't particularly feel comfortable. I'd prefer to speak to people because they can get the wrong end of the stick so I tend to be more one of those people that writes an email and then reads it about 4 times before I press the send button (MI7).

Another Chief Inspector explained that because of the audit trail, providing evidence of an information exchange, and the fact that this information could then be shared with others, that officers used different forms of language and shared different types of information when communicating using formal communication channels:

Yeah. I think one of the things that's occurring to me is formal and informal is about the audit trail...you tend to ring people when you might not necessarily want to commit it to paper, if that makes sense.... it's [telephone call] where you would perhaps have a franker exchange, a more honest exchange... You're more likely to...if you're writing something down, in the formal procedures, it's much more likely to be worded, or more neutrally worded... People will be guarded because it's there [in writing]. There's no debate that you wrote down XYZ. Whereas in a phone call conversation, I mean, you remember the general principles of the conversation, but unless it's a specific phrase that stands out, the exact details would perhaps be... it's safer (MCI2).

Another Sergeant explained that formality prevented officers from being able to speak openly because of the way that formal communication was open to scrutiny from others:

I suppose formality in a process makes people more aware, probably more defensive, definitely, it probably restricts communication in some ways..., people are very guarded, communication is blocked, hindered (MPS1).

One Inspector explained that guarded represented weighing up the risks of challenging in terms of potential career implications:

I: Yeah, OK. And so would you describe it as fear? How would you describe it as, that need to be conscious of that?

P: It's not quite fear. I would just say I'd be guarded.

I: Right, OK. Making sure that you said, didn't say anything that could be used then in that promotion process for somebody to say no, not that person, because...

P: Yeah (MI8).

Another Inspector explained that being guarded represented a lack of trust, not only in individuals, but also acknowledged that the organisation engendered a competitiveness which meant that they needed to be guarded in most interactions with other officers:

I: Mm. Do you find then that you kind of are maybe a bit more guarded with what you say then, because it's formal?

P: Yeah, definitely. Definitely... I think I'm guarded anyway, naturally, as a person, and certainly over the years, and this whole business about trust, it's very unfortunate but I trust no-one at all as in you know, yes, they're people you work with, and you've got to give, and we work and function, but as it comes down to the ultimate trust, then you've got to just look after, you know... (MI4).

When trying to understand the prevalence of risk that officers felt when challenging their superiors, one Constable explained that she considered most conversations were formal:

In a policing context there's nothing really that's off the record....what you're dealing with day to day in..., the jobs that you're dealing with every day, you're dealing with members of the public so there's nothing off the record, everything is logged, written down, times, date, blah blah blah (MPC1).

This sentiment was also echoed by another Inspector who explained that much of the communication that she engaged in at work was formal: “75% is formal, 25% isn't, but on an awful day where it's really busy it could be as high as 90% is formal and then 10% [informal]” (MI7).

This section has indicated that formal communication channels were considered to be risky because of the recording of information and its potential to be shared with others which might have negative implications for the participants' career progression. This caused participants to be guarded when using formal communication channels. The next section will now present the findings to show how perceived formality appeared to shape upward challenge.

6.3 How Does Perceived Formality Shape Upward Challenge?

Promotion

As was demonstrated earlier, the power and influence that the superior was afforded by their more senior role caused officers to be concerned that challenging upwards would negatively shape their career. The theme of promotion was highlighted consistently by almost all participants and was a dominant theme in the focus group. As described in the section on defining formal relationship with superior, the power and influence the superior yielded was important when considering upward challenge in terms of potential risk to career direction.

Therefore, whether a participant aspired to be promoted did appear to be an influencing factor in discussions about challenging their superior. There is a strong culture in the UKPS of moving upward through the ranks, and participants described that anyone reaching the rank of Sergeant was expected to be aiming for promotion. Although promotion was not an a priori theme and not planned to be discussed in the interviews, most of the participants made their promotion aspirations clear during the interviews. Seven officers were aiming for promotion, seven officers were not aiming for promotion and there were five where their aspirations were unclear. However, the fact that 16 out of the 19 participants were at least at the rank of Sergeant indicated that promotion and career progression had been important to them at some stage. The theme of promotion highlighted that officers were mindful of the risks associated with challenging upwards which caused them to challenge using a strategy which they thought would reduce the risk. The next section will explore the types of strategies that officers appeared to use.

Challenge. This theme illustrated situations where participants were more likely to challenge rather than remain silent. Two themes emerged to explain why this might be the case.

Felt Responsibility. In terms of challenging decisions which officers felt were unethical, a number of participants explained that they didn't feel they had a choice; "if you don't, actually you're neglecting your duty really, because you've got an obligation, the public expects us to do it" (MI2). The obligation officers felt was shaped by expectations including those set by themselves, those of the public and those of the organisation:

... it's what people would expect of me morally, it's what the public would expect of me, it's what the organisation and my senior command team would expect me to be like. And if I was to be that person that looked away or didn't take action or turned a

blind eye because I wanted to be everyone's mate, I'd feel weak. I wouldn't be happy doing that (MPS3).

Although a number of participants did not feel confident about upward challenge, they appeared to feel responsible for voice in situations where they felt they could make a difference. As a result, challenge appeared to become more necessary as officers became more senior because of the larger responsibility which they felt to ensure that the police achieved the best results for the public. One Chief Inspector explained:

And the previous Superintendent had an idea about how some of our response resources would be working. And it was absolutely fundamentally flawed, it simply wasn't going to work, it just wasn't going to work. So I thought, you know, you're sort of mid-order, you're an Inspector now, you have certain responsibilities incumbent on you, you can't just sit there and not say anything, because exactly as you say, if you allow... I won't say it's for evil to succeed, it's for good men to do nothing and all that sort of business. So I thought, well, no, you know, you've got to this level of the organisation, it's a responsibility on you now to voice your opinion and I said, in the politest possible terms, no, I don't think that would work, the logistics of that won't work. If you're moving all of your resources to one side of the city, it's incredibly naïve or whatever the polite term I used was, you're not going to be able to move them in rush hour to the other side of the city where the next demand for it would be. It just isn't going to work, the logistics are against it. And it went down very very badly. And I found out later that the individual concerned had been making efforts and comments about me, trying to get me removed from the project because they thought I was too negative (MCI2).

Officers spoke out because they were conscious of the public scrutiny which they were under and felt they needed to be accountable for the actions that they carried out.

If I, if I was in court, in relation to a particular case, and I was asked a question about, “but didn’t you think that that would be a risk there, [name of participant]?” “Oh yeah.” “Well, didn’t you share that with your management team then, to explain to them there might be a risk in taking that approach?” “No, because we live in a, we work for a service that’s command-driven.” That just wouldn’t wash, would it, in court? (MCI4).

Another Constable explained that she was conscious of her need to challenge particular behaviours as she was always considering how it might reflect badly on the reputation of the UKPS.

You see some colleagues who are quite, really dynamic with self-defence and stuff, and they’re good, and the situation needs it. And then I think, but if a different camera is looking on it, is part of the problem. We’ve all seen it on television, where you know, the camera would like to get that bit where it just looks like the officer’s doing something wrong, et cetera et cetera. So it’s made me really, I don’t know if it’s a good thing or a bad thing for my own, for my own preservation and my own safety, basically (MPC3)

Self-Protection. Challenge was also likely to take place where officers felt that by remaining silent, there was a chance that the result might be worse for them than the possible risk of challenging upwards.

I’ll always challenge people if I think they’re doing something that is breaching their integrity or is bringing question to my integrity, because I am certainly never ever going to lose my job or my salary and my wage and everything I’ve worked for just because I want to fit into a group (MPC2).

Silence

Despite the fact that there were a number of officers who described being willing to challenge, there were also a number of discussions about reasons why officers might not challenge. There were a number of themes that emerged to explain why.

Fitting In. This theme appeared to indicate that officers new in service would be more wary of speaking up than those with more experience because they were concerned that if they didn't fit in, they would be ostracised. One Constable explained that in the early stages of their career, new officers may prefer not to challenge.

I suppose if you're young in service you just go with the flow. Because you don't want to stick your head above the parapet, so to speak, and I suppose later on in your service you're not scared to challenge people, but you've also again got to be mindful of the fact that you don't want to raise an issue and then become, you know, the odd one out, so to speak, and you know, make a name for yourself (MPC2).

However, there was no evidence to suggest that more experienced officers were more willing to challenge, suggesting that this concern could be one that was shared by all participants.

Futility. Many officers explained that not all superiors were receptive to hearing the views of their officers. One experienced Inspector explained how, after trying to help his superior but having his help rebuffed previously, the next time he inclined towards silence: "I wouldn't bother with this bloke, I'd just let him drop in it because he's arrogant and, you know. And if that's what you want, if you, you know, get on with it" (MI5).

There were also a number of decisions where officers described challenge as pointless because they knew that the decision would not be changed. These types of decisions included

where a process needed to be implemented to gather information that was mainly useful for support functions only, adding another task to the officers' role for which they didn't see any benefit; the introduction of a new force IT system designed to manage the daily workload of Constables and Sergeants; and pension reform and budget cuts shaped by the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Discipline. Given the hierarchical nature of the police force, and an expectation that officers would carry out instructions provided by their superior, a number of officers explained that in certain situations they would not challenge. One Chief Inspector explained that many officers at Constable level do not voice their concerns because the disciplined organisation in which they work leads them towards action, rather than challenge: "I guess one, it's a wariness of raising their head above the parapet. Two, they just think, well actually this is the process, we just need to get on with it." (MCI4). The theme of discipline highlighted how the power differences between an officer and their superior could lead to some officers choosing not to challenge.

The next section will now consider, having made a decision whether to challenge or remain silent, how the officers decided up on the most appropriate strategy.

Upward Challenge Strategies

The risk of damaging career opportunities associated with challenging a superior was frequently talked about throughout the interviews and the focus group. One Chief Inspector explained why upward challenge could be perceived by some superiors to be problematic and therefore risky.

So to confront that bad idea is almost as if you're going against the command, the lawful order, all those sorts of things that are so ingrained in the police psyche, that it is my experience that direct objection and confrontation doesn't really work because

you're working that power base, you're rocking that pecking order and hierarchy (MCI2).

When considering how formality shaped upward challenge, five strategies were identified: presentation of facts, solution-focused, delay, tact and diplomacy, and "in private". Each of these strategies will be described in more detail below. The data in this section came from the 13 semi-structured interviews carried out with Inspectors and Chief Inspectors.

Presentation of facts. The first strategy represented challenge based on information rather than opinion, that gave officers a level of certainty that they were justified to challenge:

But I'll challenge it in an informed way, and I'll challenge it by saying, well, in relation to what's being proposed, there's this particular threat here and if we take, go this route, then that threat or that risk to the public or officers isn't being mitigated. So I'll do it from an informed basis, to say, if you go down that approach, this won't work (MCI4).

Solution-focused. The second strategy offered a rationale for the challenge by not only explaining the problem using facts, but then offering a solution to the superior, in order to avoid giving the impression of negativity. "You'd have to say, that's a load of rubbish because of X, Y and Z. And if you're capable of, at least give the reasons why it's a load of rubbish, and then try and suggest an alternative" (MCI2). One common topic of challenge appeared to be around staffing issues and the number of officers available. One Inspector explained that when challenge was driven by staffing problems, one form of solution presented was to offer superiors the only solution available to them and highlight the lack of other options.

But I'm quite happy to go back to the Chief Inspector or above, I'll go upstairs and say right, you've asked us to do all this, I've done a ring round, found out what

everybody's doing and you've got no chance. We'll be able to do XYZ for you but we'll not be able to do this (MI3).

Delay. The third strategy represented that officers did not necessarily challenge immediately as soon as they disagreed with a decision. One Chief Inspector described the way in which he would introduce a delay to challenge in order to ensure the best chance of success. He had earlier explained that this approach had been developed following bitter experience.

You usually form your opinion, that's not going to work but I can't fully articulate why. Particularly against someone who has put a lot of effort into this particular idea or thought and have got all their reasons stacked up as to why it is going to work. I don't think it is, but because I haven't formulated my arguments properly I'm going to buy myself a bit of time, work it out properly, and then try a different avenue (MCI2).

Another Inspector explained that buying some time allowed her to present her views in a less emotional way.

If somebody tells me I've got to do something then I would never say, well, I'm not doing that. I might not be happy about it and I might think, well, I need to feed back about this in a constructive way when I've gone away and calmed down about it a bit (MI7).

Tact and Diplomacy. The fourth strategy appeared to be slowly introducing the challenge before talking more directly with the superior about the problem.

...very tactful, ...that's the nature of our job, isn't it. It is very tactful. You'd have to sort of just go into that discussion and sort of, you know, almost

probably start somewhere else and then just bring round to that and then sort of get, you know, get the conversation going and start bringing this into it and discuss it. And then I can tend to be direct after that, I tend to say, right, but this is how it is (MI2).

Another Inspector explained that challenging diplomatically represented respect for the superior.

I'm quite a formal person when it comes to respect for rank, I don't know where it came from, but, yeah. I would definitely do it in a respectful way. But I'm an old guy aren't I, so I've got the ability to speak my mindDiplomatically, of course (MI6).

“In Private”. The fifth strategy highlighted that upward challenge was considered best done in private. One Inspector described how he discovered that his superior was more receptive to challenge when he was on his own. He had noticed that superiors were likely to take on board feedback or input to decisions in private because it allowed the superior to feel less threatened by challenge from a lower ranked officer:

I think when you see people one on one and this is a real golden thread for me, police officers, senior police officers react differently in this environment where there's no other body to corroborate what's said or anything, that is a golden thread for me (MI5).

In a similar way, a number of participants explained that when voicing concerns to superiors they preferred to have a conversation to which they referred to as “behind closed doors”.

I challenged upwards with my previous superior on regular occasions, and it was more just a behind closed doors conversation because I always work on the remit that you can disagree with everybody, you can certainly disagree with your line superior

behind closed doors, but you have to give a public view to the staff that you're joined and that you're believing in the same things even if you actually don't (MCI3).

“In private” and “behind closed doors” did not appear to be considered formal communication when considering two of the characteristics that were identified when defining formal communication; record and audience. For example, “in private”, representing a face to face conversation, would not be captured by an organisational recording which was often the case using other channels such as email or telephone. This prevented the opportunity for the conversation to be shared with others, potentially causing embarrassment to the superior or giving others at more senior levels the opportunity to consider the officer's challenge inappropriate and use their influence to badmouth them.

The absence of an audience provided the opportunity for the officer to challenge without publicly embarrassing the superior, something which participants described could have negative implications. Furthermore, the lack of others to witness the conversation allowed the officer to speak with their superior in such a way that was respectful and appropriate for the relationship that they had without the manner in which this was done being judged by others as inappropriate. Also, the lack of others to witness the exchange, reduced the risk of others knowing about it.

In contrast to “in private” and “behind closed doors”, there was an additional form of challenge which was discussed by one Inspector but this was not considered to be a strategy, but rather the only option that he felt he had because he wasn't working at the time, therefore preventing him from having a private conversation with his superior. “I've fought that with quite a robust email at first, because I was off duty when I saw it and then I marched into [CI]'s office and said look...” (MI1). Email, could be considered to be formal because the channel was recorded.

Five strategies for upward challenge were identified. These strategies were used by officers to challenge a superior's decision but in a way that highlighted their respect for the superior's more senior position within the organisation. The strategies were designed to ensure that the officer did not give the superior cause to use their power and influence to negatively shape their career progression whilst still enabling the officer to challenge for the reasons outlined earlier. Participants indicated that upward challenge could take place face to face in private, or on email, although it appeared that the preference was to challenge in private and that email was only used where a private conversation was not possible.

Distance

As I carried out the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews, I became aware that a theme of distance began to emerge. Distance referred to the frequency of contact that officers had with their superior. For example, the less contact, the more distance could be said to exist. Furthermore, the distance that separated officers and their superiors appeared, to some extent, to shape the channels that they used to communicate with each other. For example, the officers and superiors that had less contact tended to use formal channels of communication; email, scheduled meetings and telephone (previously defined as predominantly formal during the card sort activity). Although reduced face to face contact with their superior did not appear to preclude challenge from taking place, it is highly likely that officers who have very little contact with their superiors outside of formal channels, had the opportunity to challenge less or found it more difficult. The theme of distance represents an unexpected finding but one which highlighted the importance of organisational design in helping to understand how formal communication and formal relationship with superior shaped upward challenge.

Four themes were identified which explained the extent to which officers and their superiors were subject to distance: geographical distance, temporal distance, task distance and strategic distance. The themes of geographical and temporal distance highlighted that opportunities for communication were largely restricted to formal channels of communication because of the lack of opportunity for face to face contact as a result of working in different locations or on different shifts. The themes of task distance and strategic distance highlighted that opportunities for communication were restricted because the role design reduced the need for officers and their superiors to interact because they were working on different activities. The four forms of distance appeared to be most prevalent between the ranks of Inspector and Chief Inspector shown in Table 13.

Table 13. *Types of distance and its variation by rank for NPG and SNT*

| Rank | Geographic Distance | Temporal distance | Task Distance | Strategic Distance |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| PC and Sgt | | | | |
| Sgt and Insp. | NPG&SNT | SNT | | |
| Insp. and Chief Insp. | NPG&SNT | NPG | NPG&SNT | NPG&SNT |
| Chief Insp. and Supt. | | | | |

Geographic distance. This theme explains how being based at different physical locations could lead to reduced contact between officers and their superiors. Constables and

their Sergeants described how they were usually based at the same station. Therefore, it was mainly Sergeants and Inspectors that were geographically distant from their superiors.

Sergeants were based at a number of different stations so it was impossible for them to be with their Inspector all of the time. One Inspector explained a typical arrangement: "We run five different stations, so I've got three Sergeants and ..., two Sergeants run two stations and one Sergeant runs one. I work at the main station...I very rarely see them" (MI3). She then went on to explain that it was difficult trying to get to know officers when interaction was limited to formal situations: "Yeah, it's quite difficult when you don't see them on a regular basis, ..., it's trying to gauge people through your supervisory meetings and how they respond to, ..., seeing how they react to you" (MI3). Supervisor meetings were the only opportunity that the Inspector had to sit down and talk to her Sergeants outside of dealing with direct operational issues.

Most Inspectors were also located remotely from their Chief Inspectors which meant that they had little face to face contact with them. One Chief Inspector explained:

I've got, what is it, eight Inspectors, working different shift patterns and this, that and the other. So my actual physically seeing them is quite rare.... So the contact I have with them has to be more formally arranged....But it makes it much more difficult because of, they work two day shifts out of ten....I only have the opportunity to see them twice in a month (MCI2).

Participants described that channels of communication were restricted because of the geographical distance. "Telephone and email would be the only method I would be able to get in touch with my actual line superior" (MI6). Another Chief Inspector explained how the geographical distance meant that any of his Inspectors going out of their way to go and see him would indicate something formal and therefore serious:

But it's...the isolation of where I am, or the location, because it's not something they just happen to pass, I generally expect the Inspector coming to myself on that basis would be more formal (MCI5).

In contrast to the Sergeants and their Inspectors, and Inspectors and their Chief Inspectors who were not co-located, Chief Inspectors were based at the same location as their Superintendents, and as a result, their relationships tended to be characterised by ongoing and frequent communications. "So we work together as a team, daily, talking daily, meeting daily, discussing and planning at strategic level daily...we all work on the same corridor" (MCI4).

The theme of geographical distance highlighted that where officers were not co-located with their superiors, they had reduced opportunity for contact with each other compared to those that enjoyed working from the same location. Furthermore, communication was predominantly formal when they did speak.

Temporal distance. Shift patterns, followed mainly by Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors caused distance between some levels of the organisation. The results for Neighbourhood Patrol Group (NPG) and Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) are presented separately because of the different shift pattern systems that they worked.

Neighbourhood Patrol Group. NPG Constable, Sergeant and Inspector participants worked regular shift patterns which consisted of two day shifts, two late shifts and two night shifts as shown in Figure 4.

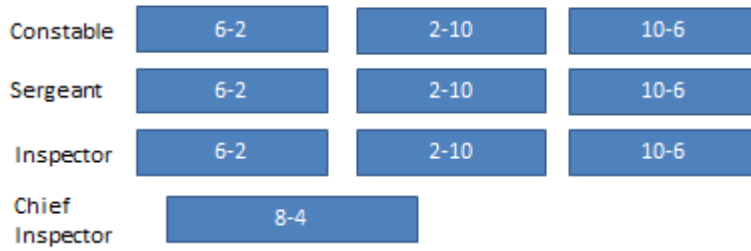


Figure 4. NPG Typical Shift Pattern

This shift pattern provided the 24x7 cover required to provide the public with an emergency operational response. Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors mainly followed the same shift pattern whereas Chief Inspectors worked regular day shifts meaning opportunities for face to face contact were limited where officers found themselves rostered on a shift at different time.

Safer Neighbourhood Teams. SNT Constables and Sergeants tended to work a two-shift pattern comprising 7am – 3pm or 3pm – 10pm. Inspectors and Chief Inspectors tended to work a regular day shift of Monday to Friday between 8am and 4pm as shown in Figure 5.

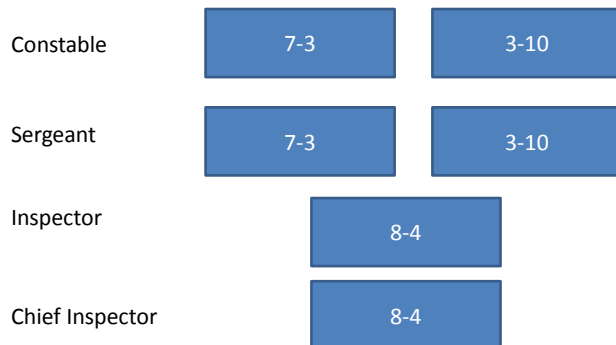


Figure 5. SNT Typical Shift Pattern (Monday to Friday only)

Compared to the 24x7 NPG shift pattern, this shift pattern reflected the less reactive nature of their work, meaning that 24x7 cover was not required to manage the longer-term community relationships on which SNT focused. In contrast to NPG work, Inspectors and Chief Inspectors were likely to work similar shifts, suggesting that

Inspectors and Chief Inspectors would have more opportunity for contact than their NPG colleagues. However, Sergeants on a late shift (3-10pm) would have reduced opportunity for contact with their superior.

The theme of temporal distance highlighted that different shift patterns reduced the opportunity for some officers and superiors to speak to each other restricting their communication to formal channels such as email.

Task distance. This theme explains how Inspectors and Chief Inspectors might not have had the opportunity to communicate frequently as a result of the nature of their job design. This was because they were not focused on the same sorts of tasks. For example, Chief Inspectors managed both NPG and SNT activities but at the ranks below Chief Inspector, that is Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors, the officers were involved in only NPG or SNT activities. Figure 6 provides an illustration of the organisational structure.

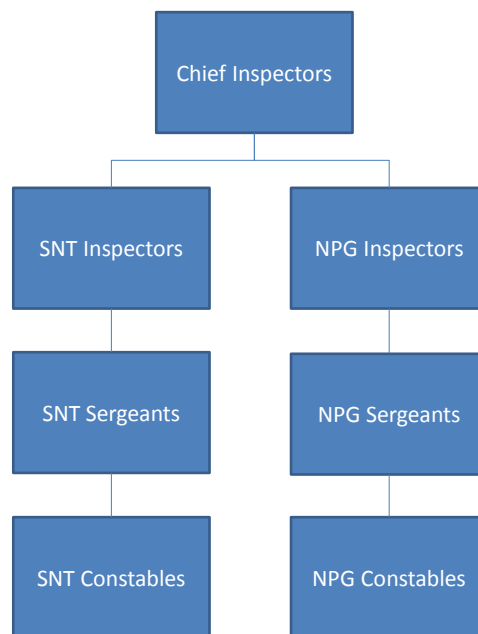


Figure 6. Hierarchical structure showing distribution of NPG and SNT officers

The nature of SNT and NPG work is different, with NPG being described as “fast-time” and SNT as “slow-time” by participants. The nature of NPG work provided ongoing and frequent opportunities for officers and their superiors to communicate with each other. The Chief Inspectors were updated as and when NPG situations arose, keeping them in touch with important developments. On the other hand, owing to the slow-time nature of SNT, the Chief Inspectors were usually updated about developments only during daily, weekly or monthly scheduled meetings. As a result, the SNT Inspectors described how they had very little contact with their Chief Inspectors outside of these scheduled meetings. “The Chief Inspector probably wouldn’t know that level of detail, we just give him a précis of what we’re doing when we have those monthly crime tasking meetings so he’s always got an idea of where we’re going” (MI2).

One SNT Inspector highlighted that having a Chief Inspector who came from an NPG background was problematic because the Chief Inspector didn’t have an understanding of what the SNT role required. Therefore, he tended not to dedicate much time personally to SNT tasks: “He’s come to this environment and is dodging meetings and puts it on a deputy because he doesn’t know what we’re talking about, I think he finds it a different language” (MI5).

Despite the need for NPG Inspectors to update Chief Inspectors regularly, it was not always the case that NPG Inspectors and their Chief Inspectors had easy access to each other. Chief Inspectors were often assigned to specialist roles known as cadres, which frequently removed them from their substantive policing role as an operational Chief Inspector. Where they should have been available for their substantive role but were not, and in order to ensure there was always a Chief Inspector responsible for formal operational matters, there was a Critical Incident Superior (CIM) process in place. The CIM was designed to ensure that there was always a point of escalation for Inspectors.

CIMs followed an on-call duty rota. Therefore, when an issue was escalated, it may not have been their own Chief Inspector to whom the Inspector was speaking. An experienced NPG Inspector explained that he only spoke to his superior once every ten days, partly because of the CIM and partly because he worked in a different station to this Chief Inspector.

The theme of task distance highlighted that opportunities for contact between Inspectors and Chief Inspectors may be limited by the nature of the work they carried out.

Strategic distance. This theme explains how a focus on tactical policing by Chief Inspectors and a focus on operational policing by Inspectors presented a barrier to communication. Figure 7 illustrates the focus of each hierarchical level, strategic, tactical and operational. The strategic level, which is representative of the most senior officers in the force, is not the focus of this present study and will therefore not be discussed further.



Figure 7. Hierarchical structuring showing strategic distance.

Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors are described as operational roles focusing on local, day to day policing matters. On the other hand, the next three ranks, Chief Inspectors, Superintendents and Chief Superintendents are described as tactical roles. These tactical roles focus on large-scale, force-wide and longer-terms issues such as serious organised crime and child sexual exploitation (CSE). As a result of the difference in focus, Chief Inspectors are less involved with day to day operations than Inspectors. This meant that they both had different priorities as described by one Inspector:

If you ask a frontline Sergeant what the most important thing they have to deal with on a day to day basis, it'll be mental health, missing from home and crime list. You ask our senior superiors what they should be focusing on every day, it's acquisitive crime, crime prevention, and all stuff like that, and gun crime (MI1).

The present study showed that Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors worked very closely together, often communicating constantly throughout the day, owing to the fact that they were working on shared operational issues:

Yeah, it's extremely different to the picture I link with my boss, because they're with me every minute of the day, we work together on every incident, and although I'm the boss and I have to take responsibility of what happens, there are three of them and me and we just have to get through every day and the volume of work that comes towards us. We work together, I have to make the decisions but I have interactions with them on a minute by minute basis (MI6).

In a similar way, the ranks of Chief Inspector, Superintendent and Chief Superintendent appeared to work very closely together and had regular and frequent contact, again owing to the fact that they were working jointly on tactical issues: "So we work together as a team, daily, talking daily, meeting daily, discussing and planning at

strategic level daily" (MCI4). However, at the intersection between operational and tactical roles, that is between the roles of Inspector and Chief Inspector, the participants had reduced opportunities for speaking about operational matters, particularly for SNT. One Inspector explained that once Chief Inspectors did start to become distant, it made it difficult for Inspectors to talk to them about operational issues:

[CI] and I have known each other for probably about seven, eight years, you know, and he's, the good thing about [CI] is that he's quite fresh off the factory floor, so he's been frontline, so I can speak to him about frontline issues and he's got a modicum of understanding and he hasn't got any sort of ivory tower syndrome yet (MI1).

The theme of strategic distance highlighted that Chief Inspectors were focused on tactical policy issues and Inspectors were focused on operational policing issues which reduced opportunities for contact between them because of the different focus of their roles.

Summary

The main focus of this dissertation was to highlight how perceived formality shaped upward challenge. The literature review identified that definitions of formal relationship with superior and formal communication needed to be established before drawing any conclusions about how perceived formality shaped upward challenge. Data from card sort activities, thinking aloud protocols, interviews, and one focus group were carried out to establish that formal relationship with superior was defined by power and relationship quality; formal communication was identified by three characteristics, record, content and audience. Upward challenge where there was a formal relationship with superior or formal communication was identified as risky and promotion was identified as one of the main reasons why upward challenge was felt to be risky. One emergent theme, distance, was identified as a potential influence over perceptions of formality highlighting the importance of organisational design.

Therefore, it could be said that perceived formality heightens the risk of upward challenge because it increases the perceived likelihood that superiors will use their power and influence to negatively shape career progression. As a result, perceived formality appeared to result in examples of both voice and silence, but where upward challenge took place, a number of strategies were used to mitigate risk: presentation of facts, solution focused, delay, tact and diplomacy, and “in private”. Chapter Six will provide an interpretation of these findings using three theoretical bases through which to view the contributions.

Chapter Seven Discussion

Introduction

This dissertation explored the way that perceived formality shaped upward challenge. Upward challenge is an important area of study because it has the potential to prevent organisational problems as well as identify opportunities for improvement for organisations. The findings showed that the amount of formal communication one Inspector engaged in was estimated to be between 75% and 90% of her total communication during a day. Therefore, it would appear that perceived formality is highly prevalent and deserving of further attention. Two areas were identified where perceptions of formality were likely to have shaped upward challenge; relationship with superior and communication. In order to understand how perceived formality shaped upward challenge, it was first necessary to define formality. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand how participants defined a formal relationship with their superior. A card sort activity and thinking aloud protocols (TAP) were used to understand how participants differentiated between formal and informal communication. Nineteen serving UK Police officers comprising Constables, Sergeants, Inspectors and Chief Inspectors from one police force took part in this study. Findings were offered in Chapter Five to show how participants had defined the two types of perceived formality and how it appeared to shape upward challenge. The main research question for this study was:

RQ1. How does perceived formality shape upward challenge?

In order to define formality, two additional research questions were asked:

RQ 2.1 How can a formal relationship with superior be defined?

RQ 2.2 How can formal communication be defined?

This chapter will use three main headings to discuss the findings; perceived formality can be situational, perceived formality signifies risk, and perceived formality increases effort. The headings represent the main theoretical underpinnings which help to explain the way that perceived formality might shape upward challenge.

7.1 Perceived Formality can be Situational

The Communication Situation Model (CSM) highlighted that perceptions of formality were likely to be shaped by six factors; culture, content, relationship, involvement, temporality and control (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). When trying to compare the six factors in the model with influences over perceived formality identified in the present study, the difficulty in doing so highlighted the complex and ambiguous nature of influences over perceptions of formality. Despite the difficulty, this section will argue that perceived formality should be considered situational and not a constant feature of organisational life. The importance of the situational nature of formality highlights that it is likely that individuals will have different perceptions of formality at different times and from each other. Firstly, this section will examine the influences of perceived formality that were identified as a result of direct exploration of how participants defined a formal relationship with superior and formal communication.

Formal Communication. Many of the studies that have looked at voice and silence have not considered the nature of the communication channel as an influence over voice. However, the communication channel that a subordinate uses to challenge a superior has been identified as a likely influence over voice and silence (Harlos, 2001). However, the formality of the channel was judged differently by different people, suggesting that formality might be socially constructed and therefore subject to perception (Harlos, 2001). The present study found that only three out of eleven channels rated by all of the participants were categorised as formal by all participants. Data analysis revealed three characteristics that participants

used to define formal communication and differentiate it from informal communication; record, content and audience. The three characteristics were weighted differently by participants according to the situation, meaning that some participants viewed a communication channel as formal where others didn't, as illustrated by the examples of Morning Briefing and Point to Point radio in Chapter Five. Therefore, the present study advances knowledge by highlighting that the difference between formal and informal communication was not consistently identified by channel as much of the literature suggests but it was more consistently determined by three characteristics. This finding provides support for the CSM which suggested that the way that individuals viewed formal and informal communication was affected by organisational context and therefore situationally dependent (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). In line with the CSM, the present study found that it is more appropriate to talk about formal voice situations given the findings which indicated that three characteristics influenced perceptions of formal communication; record, content and audience. Reasons for why the three characteristics that defined formality were identified in the present study can be understood with reference to existing literature.

Record. This theme identified that formality was associated with situations where there was a record of the conversation. The documentable nature of formal communication has been a consistent feature used to distinguish between formal and informal communication (Kowtha et al., 2001; Lievrouw & Finn, 1996; Lovejoy & Grudin, 2003). In the present study, the findings showed that the recordings could be of a personal or an organisational nature. Furthermore, whether the recording was likely to be produced at some stage in the future was also an important determinant of whether it shaped perceptions of formality.

It is important to consider why a recording of upward challenge might have signalled formality in the present study. The recordable nature of formal communication is often advantageous for organisations because it provides evidence of how decisions have been

made. As a result, the use of recordable channels such as email has become commonplace in organisations because of its ability to keep an audit trail (Marchington & Suter, 2013). Where recording becomes commonplace in organisations, channels associated with it are more likely to be perceived of as formal (Lovejoy & Grudin, 2003). The need to access archived emails may be a more regular occurrence in the public sector where subordinates are often subject to public scrutiny as a result of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (www.gov.uk, 2016b). Within the UKPS specifically, frequent investigations by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) also means that all police officers are likely to be aware that the information they share in emails can be analysed and used as evidence to uphold or refute a complaint, making them vigilant about their use of email. It is therefore likely that communication channels where recordings are available led to perceptions of formality in the present study because of the high levels of public scrutiny associated with them.

The CSM did not contain a specific reference to the recordability of communication channels as an influence over perceived formality (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). However, it can be understood as a form of control. In the CSM, control represented the ability of the individual to influence the way in which the conversation took place. The fact that once there is a recording of the conversation means that the individual no longer has control over what happens to it. Therefore, a record is likely to signify reduced control.

Audience. The present study identified that where other people unknown to the participants were likely to be witness to the challenge, then this would also signify a formal communication situation. The importance of the familiarity with the audience in shaping perceptions of formality can be understood by considering that where others were present, there was more likelihood of people talking about the behaviour of others. The competitive nature of the promotion process within the UKPS was also likely to cause officers to be wary of giving others any cause to badmouth them. Within the UKPS, the importance of a good

reputation was important for career progression, and given that upward challenge did not appear to be a routine occurrence amongst the participants, it was likely that people would talk about situations where officers challenged upwards, particularly where the upward challenge attempt did not have a successful outcome. The voice and silence literature has showed some interest in the nature of the target for voice, but the role of the wider audience does not appear to have been identified as an influence. When trying to understand the characteristic of audience using the CSM, it is possible that an unknown audience also signalled a reduction in control over information because it was not possible to know what unfamiliar people would do with the information.

Content. The present study found that this characteristic identified that conversations about work were considered to be formal. Research has shown that it is possible for subordinates to consider conversations about work as informal (Lovejoy & Grudin, 2003; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). However, this was not the case in the present study. In a similar way to record, it is likely that the high levels of public scrutiny explained the perceived formality of work-related conversations. The CSM identified the content of the information as an influence over perceived formality and the present study has found support for this factor (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996).

The identification of the three characteristics which have been shown to influence perceptions of formal communication in the present study has highlighted the importance of understanding organisational context. Voice and silence research using police samples appears to be very rare although some studies have used unspecified law enforcement and public sector organisations as part of their sample which might include police departments (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999; Kassing & Kava, 2013; Kassing, 2000, 2002). However, the present study would suggest that the nature of policing could be very

different to that of other organisations owing to the higher levels of public scrutiny and is therefore worthy of specific focus.

This section has identified that the three characteristics used to define formal communication can be interpreted using the CSM as factors which influence an individual's perception of formality. The next section will look at the role of power and relationship quality and how they contribute towards perceived formality.

Formal Relationship with Superior

The literature review identified two areas where perceived formality was likely to shape upward challenge: power and relationship quality (LMX). The findings identified that perceptions of formal relationship with superior were linked to power differentials and the superior's ability to use negatively influence chances of promotion. This section will now discuss how participants defined a formal relationship with their superior which will provide additional insights into perceived formality within the UKPS.

Relationship Quality. The role of the superior is a formal one within the organisation and as such is characterised by power differences (Rank, 2008). The relationship that a subordinate can have with a superior can be described as high, medium or low using LMX theory. A low quality relationship has also been described as a formal one (Mowbray et al., 2014). Relationship quality is theorised to develop from low to medium or high over time, resulting in the subordinate having more influence over their own tasks and activities. Accordingly, a low quality relationship is more likely to experience supervision exchanges than a medium or high one (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). A supervision exchange "involves the superior's almost exclusive reliance on the formal employment contract and legitimate authority in exchanges with the subordinate" (Waldron, Hunt, & DSilva, 1993 p.256). A supervision exchange can be contrasted with a leadership exchange which is more likely to

take place in a medium or high quality relationship because “the superior relies not only on the formal contract, but also on the interpersonal exchange relationship with the subordinate” (Waldron et al., 1993 p.256).

The present study found that even where participants described their relationship quality as good or excellent, they still recognised that they were not able to influence their superior in every situation. This would indicate that supervision exchanges can exist even where relationship quality is considered to be high, and when supervision exchanges take place, upward challenge might be less likely. According to the LMX lifecycle model which suggests that subordinates and superiors invest in building good relationships which might make superiors more open to listening to the views of subordinates, the present study has found that in the UKPS, there are occasions when even a high quality relationship does not guarantee that the officer will have their views considered. This meant that participants described having both a formal and a high quality relationship with their superior, meaning that in some situations, the relationship with superior may be perceived as more formal than others. This would indicate that measures of LMX might not be appropriate for understanding exactly how relationship quality shapes upward challenge because the measure of LMX does not take into account the changeable or situational nature of the relationship subordinates have with their superior. The next section can provide some insight into the role that power may play in understanding the situational nature of a formal relationship with superior.

The Role of Power. The findings section highlighted that the power differences between officers and their superiors signalled a formal relationship. This was in line with common conceptions of hierarchical organisations where superiors are recognised as having more power (Rank, 2008). It was recognised by the participants that the superior could use authority to ensure subordinates complied with decisions. The literature review has demonstrated that subordinates are more likely to withhold information from superiors than

other members of the organisation (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003), and the reason for this is thought to be underpinned by power differentials (Morrison & Rothman, 2009). The increased power that a superior enjoys leads subordinates to be concerned that speaking up can lead to negative implications such as retaliation or damage to important relationships (Milliken et al., 2003). However, in the present study, participants recognised that their superior did not always force them to comply with actions. Sometimes officers recognised that they felt more powerful because they had greater experience or expertise than their superior. This would indicate that feelings of power distance are likely to change according to different situations.

The importance of recognising that a formal relationship with superior is unlikely to be a constant feature in medium or high level quality relationships highlights that studies using theories of LMX or power distance to predict upward challenge are unlikely to capture the variable nature of the formality that exists between superiors and their subordinates. It is possible to suggest that situations where supervision exchanges are most likely outside of a poor quality relationship is in a command and control organisation where there is a high degree of centralised decision-making such as the UKPS. When interpreting this finding using the CSM, it would appear that the culture within the UKPS allows a high LMX relationship with an expectation of supervision exchange to develop.

The sections above have attempted to assimilate elements of perceived formality with those factors identified in the CSM. The next section on distance will attempt to highlight the influence of distance over perceptions of formality using two theoretical models. As a result, the situational nature of perceived formality between a subordinate and a superior can be understood more clearly. Furthermore, distance provides a link between relationship with superior and communication.

Distance. The previous section has used the CSM to highlight that perceptions of formality were likely to be situational and the present study has found evidence to suggest that the relationship, content and control factors are likely to have contributed to perceptions of formality in the present study. The benefit of the case study approach used in the present study is that it has been able to identify a number of factors that have shaped perceptions of formal relationship with superior and communication which quantitative studies would have not been able to identify because of their approach which is focused more on generalisation of findings across a number of samples (Yin, 2009).

During the data analysis, the theme *distance* emerged as a potentially important influence over how perceptions of formality were created in the UKPS. Four themes of distance were identified; geographical, temporal, task and strategic. Furthermore, the distance also shaped the channels officers and their superiors used to communicate with each other. The theme of distance can be understood as a micro level influence over perceived formality as defined in the CSM (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996). The factor *involvement* described elements such as how close a subordinate and their superior felt to each other and the amount of interaction that they had. Therefore, it is important to understand how distance might have shaped the involvement that an officer and their superior had, which therefore shaped perceptions of formality.

The distance that might exist between a subordinate and their superior has received very little attention in the literature (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). The main reason for the lack of empirical evidence is that distance is studied implicitly within other leadership theories and therefore remains masked by other variables. For example, the Ohio State University studies argued in favour of a leader who was close to their followers, and LMX theory refers to distance when it describes the lack of trust that is characteristic of a poor quality relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). As a result, very few comprehensive

conclusions are able to be drawn about the way that distance affects subordinate-superior relationships (Napier & Ferris, 1993).

To date there are only two models which have attempted to present a theoretical understanding of distance between subordinates and their superiors. The first one presented by Napier and Ferris (1993) was the Dyadic Distance Model. The second one presented by Antonakis and Atwater (2002) was the Leader Distance Model. The Leader Distance Model was built on fundamental principles laid down by the Dyadic Distance Model so as a result, both models will be used to present the discussion drawing on relevant points from each.

The Leader Distance Model argued that there were three forms of distance which shaped subordinate-superior relations: physical distance, perceived social distance, and perceived task interaction frequency (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002).

Physical Distance. Physical distance refers to “how far or how close followers are located from their leader” (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002 p.684). The theme of geographical distance identified in the present study is synonymous with physical distance. It has been argued that where subordinates and their superiors are physically distant, there is reduced richness of information transmission. In other words, reduced face to face interaction in favour of written methods or computer mediated channels (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The theme of temporal distance is also likely to be synonymous with physical distance where officers and their superiors were on or off-duty at similar times. However, with regards to both geographical or temporal distance, neither was a constant feature. For example, some officers worked at the same station as their superior for a number of days each week and worked remotely on others. Similarly, an officer might work at the same station as their superior on the days when they are on the same shift, but not when they are off shift. Therefore, it is not

clear if the literature on physical distance takes into account the situational nature of distance, or assumes that distance is a constant feature of a relationship.

Perceived Social Distance. Perceived social distance is likely to be perceived when the power differentials between superiors and subordinates are most obvious. It can be defined as “perceived differences in status, rank, authority, social standing, and power, which affect the degree of intimacy and social contact that develop between followers” (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002 p.682). Social distance is distinct from physical distance because social distance can occur in relationships which are characterised by close proximity (the opposite of physical distance) as well as those where physical distance occurs. It has been argued that social distance is important for leaders to maintain credibility and status because when social distance is reduced, subordinates can more easily see the weaknesses of their superiors. During the discussion about definition of formal relationship with superior, theories of power distance were used to explain how high and low power distance could shape perceptions of formality. Where power distance was high, voice had been found to be low, even where high relationship quality existed (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). Power distance can therefore also be seen as part of the Leader Distance Model.

Perceived Task Interaction Frequency. Perceived task interaction frequency is defined as “the perceived degree to which leaders interact with their followers” (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002 p.686). Two forms of distance were identified in the present study which shape the frequency and type of interaction; task and strategic distance. Both of these forms of distance appeared to reduce the frequency of the interaction between Inspectors and Chief Inspectors specifically. It has been argued that subordinates and superiors who have more frequent interactions will consider themselves to be closer. However, it has also been argued that frequency of interaction can be independent of relationship quality (Antonakis &

Atwater, 2002). The absence of evidence to support these claims means that these assertions require further exploration.

When using the four themes identified in the present study to compare to the Leader Distance Model, it becomes clear that two forms of distance appeared to be most prevalent within the participant sample, physical distance and perceived task interaction frequency. It is therefore suggested that distance has the potential to create perceptions of formality by preventing officers and their superiors from getting to know each other.

It is important to note that the Leader Distance Model was mainly interested in understanding how distance affected an individual's ability to lead. The present study was interested in understanding from a subordinate's perspective how their perceptions of distance shaped perceptions of formality. The data analysis identified that distance appeared to be one factor which shaped the degree of formality that an officer described when considering the relationship with their superior. Although the perspective from which the present study is approaching distance is different, it has still been possible to use the theories on distance to draw conclusions about its relationship with perceived formality.

The Dyadic Distance Model

The second model that has attempted to explain the impact of distance for subordinate-superior relations is the Dyadic Distance Model (Napier & Ferris, 1993). It highlighted that forms of distance prevented subordinates and superiors from building effective working relationships with each other. Three forms of distance were identified which were likely to have an impact upon subordinate-superior interactions; psychological distance, structural distance and functional distance. The model suggested that psychological and structural distance resulted in functional distance. Using the Dyadic Distance model to interpret the findings, geographical, temporal, strategic and task distance can be understood

as forms of structural distance. The next section will explain how structural distance affects the relationship with superior which the present study showed is likely to shape the upward challenge strategies that are used.

Psychological Distance. Psychological distance, similar to the perceived social distance in the Leader Distance Model (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002) referred to the extent to which two people perceived themselves to be similar or different. Elements that were theorised to contribute towards feelings of psychological distance included demographic similarity such as age, sex and experience, and perceived similarity of values such as work-related values and cultural group norms, roles and values (Napier & Ferris, 1993). It was argued that where greater levels of distance are present, subordinates and superiors will have a lower quality working relationship.

Structural Distance. Structural distance referred to the extent to which subordinates and their superiors had the physical opportunity to interact or observe each other (Napier & Ferris, 1993). The present study identified that there were two different ways in which structural distance affected the relationship that officers had with their superiors. On the one hand, geographic and temporal distance reduced opportunity for interaction between officers and their superiors because they were not often working at the same times and in the same location. On the other hand, task and strategic distance required officers and their superiors to interact less frequently because of the different foci of their roles. The greatest amount of distance was likely to affect the Inspectors and Chief Inspector relationship who were likely to be subject to all four forms of distance.

The findings showed that typical frequency of interaction for Inspectors and Chief Inspectors ranged from every day whilst on shift to once every ten days because they were not based in the same police station. The physical design of organisations is important in

shaping the amount and type of communication that subordinates have with each other. For example, Kraut and colleagues (1990) found that physical proximity was conducive to informal conversations amongst R&D staff meaning that where physical proximity was not possible, informal conversations were less likely.

Where organisations provide subordinates with opportunities for regular interaction, it could be said that organisations encourage a culture where informal communication is allowed to take place. Where subordinates do not have the opportunity to interact frequently, the main forms of communication are likely to be perceived of as formal because subordinates may view informal conversation as inappropriate behaviour (Lievrouw & Finn, 1996).

The main method of communication used where officers and their superiors worked shifts was email as a result of their inability to meet face to face. It was likely to be difficult to get to know a superior through email because of the formality associated with the channel meaning that the content was strictly related to work. Furthermore, email prevented non-verbal cues and aural cues such as hesitation or tone of voice which may have been picked up using face to face, telephone or radio (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Non-verbal cues have been found to be important in face to face communication for helping to clarify meaning and understanding between individuals.

Functional Distance. Functional distance was described as the result of a combination of psychological distance and structural distance. Functional distance referred to the degree of closeness and the quality of the working relationship that a subordinate had with their superior. Where structural distance shaped the relationship quality between subordinates and their superiors, functional distance would be the result.

Napier and Ferris (1993) argued that where subordinates and superiors worked closely together, they were more likely to feel good towards each other. The importance of affect in a subordinate-superior relationship is that where two people like each other, the amount of interaction they enjoy will increase (Kraut et al., 1990), suggesting that if officers and superiors are prevented from building a relationship as a result of distance they will not get the opportunity to know each other and therefore not communicate with each other. Subordinates and their superiors who have a good working relationship are more correct in their assumptions of each other (Napier & Ferris, 1993). Also, subordinates who have a better working relationship with their superior will have better communication because they need to speak more often (Liden & Graen, 1980 as cited in Napier & Ferris, 1993).

LMX theory has shown that where superiors develop a stronger relationship with their subordinates, this is likely to result in the subordinate and the superior spending more time together (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). When subordinates and superiors work together more closely, they are likely to have more informal conversations (Kraut et al., 1990). This will be especially the case where subordinates and superiors are co-located and have easy access to each other. It is likely that voice will happen differently in a low LMX relationship than a high LMX one. This is because voice is more likely to take place using formal channels in a low LMX relationship because they are the only channels available (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2014), whereas in a high LMX relationship, there is the option for voice to take place using informal channels as well. For example, in a high LMX relationship, the use of formal channels is likely to follow an informal discussion with formal communication only being used to drive action once decisions have been made.

In summary, the distance that is created between subordinates and their superiors is predominantly shaped by the amount of interaction they have with each other. Where distance is high, subordinates and their superiors will possibly not like each other because

they don't know each other, they will perceive the world in different ways because they don't gain insight into each other's viewpoints, the relationship will be characterised by power differences because superiors do not have the opportunity to delegate work to the subordinate and their relationship quality will be less.

The present study identified that geographical, temporal, task and strategic distance were created by the organisation design in the UKPS, reducing the frequency and shaping the nature of the contact that some officers had with their superior. The quantity of distance between officers and their superiors varied across ranks and across NPG and SNT, but the greatest distance was mostly felt by the Inspector and Chief Inspector ranks, especially in NPG, where all four forms of distance existed. The findings demonstrated that where distance was greatest, participants appeared to communicate mainly through email, telephone and scheduled meetings, channels identified as formal by the majority of participants.

This section has argued that distance was likely to have increased perceptions of formality in the UKPS in two ways. Firstly, by forcing officers and their superiors to speak using formal communication channels. As discussed earlier, perceived formality of communication signalled risk. Therefore, where officers felt that it was risky to speak to their superior using formal channels, they may have preferred to remain silent. Alternatively, if they did speak to their superior, they would have been guarded when using formal communication as identified during the findings section. In both cases, perceived formality would have made it more difficult for officers and their superiors to get to know each other as a result of the various forms of distance. A recent study found support to show that communication richness was positively linked to LMX (Niedle, 2012).

The second way in which distance was likely to have increased perceptions of formality was by reducing the need for Inspectors and Chief Inspectors to speak to each

other. The task and strategic distance highlighted the different foci of the roles between Inspector and Chief Inspector, meaning that their day to day activities required little interaction.

When describing perceptions of formality, it is important to consider the two aspects of formality that were identified during the section on defining formal relationship with superior; relationship quality and power differences. A recent study identified that contrary to popular thinking, subordinate-superior dyads who worked remotely reported higher levels of LMX than those that worked physically close (Niedle, 2012). One suggestion for why this may have been the case highlighted that superiors may allow higher performers to work remotely, although this is unlikely to be the case in the present study where locations of officers are determined by role, not individual ability.

The CSM also identified a number of macro-level influences over perceptions of formality including relationships, culture and content. The next section provides some examples of macro level influences within the UKPS which are likely to contribute towards perceived formality: Discipline, Hierarchical Level and Promotion. The following elements were more difficult to assimilate directly with factors within the CSM, suggesting that the model requires further explication.

Many of the studies into voice and silence have attempted to uncover variables that will predict whether an individual has an underlying propensity to voice or be silent. However, the present study is one of the first to provide empirical support to show that perceived formality could be situational, rather than a fixed state. The reasons that perceptions of formality may have been highlighted as situational using the present study is likely to be driven by the case study nature of the present study.

Discipline. The UKPS is a command and control organisation, meaning that police officers are expected to work in situations where they receive instructions from superiors and must comply. In particular, command and control situations are most useful in times of crisis. For example, public order situations or 999 incidents. The importance of organisational climate for understanding voice and silence was highlighted in a conceptual model presented by Morrison and Milliken (2000). They suggested that there were many factors which might lead to a climate of silence, three of which are characteristic of the UKPS; a tall hierarchical organisation, a mature and stable industry, and high levels of centralised decision-making.

In the present study, some of the participants described not challenging upwards. One of the reasons for remaining silent appeared to be underpinned by the discipline that officers had learnt to accept as part of the role. As a result of the command and control culture, the psychological contract that a police officer signs up to when they join the police force is likely to be one where they expect to be told what to do, suggesting that some officers didn't view upward challenge as their role. A psychological contract can be defined as "obligations that subordinates believe their organisation owes them and the obligations the subordinates believe they owe their organisation in return" (Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003 p.188). Command structures (which can be thought of as organisation charts) formalise the relationship between the subordinate and their superior. The formalisation makes explicit which behaviours are expected and appropriate for subordinates and what level of interaction is appropriate between different levels of the hierarchy (Bisel et al., 2012).

Another participant explained that upward challenge could be perceived as an attempt to "rock the pecking order" highlighting that upward challenge could be considered an attempt to go against the command and control culture of the organisation and was therefore highly inappropriate. The influence that a superior could use to negatively shape career progression of the officer was a strong motivator in an officer's upward challenge attempts.

There were also situations where participants explained that they didn't feel it was worth challenging. These types of decisions tended to be centralised ones, such as the introduction of a new IT system, or the CSR cuts imposed by the government in 2010 (Jarrett, 2012) where officers felt that their superior was unlikely to be able to change the decision and hence, remained silent.

One of the strengths of the UKPS is its command and control culture where the obedience of officers and the lack of challenge underpin its unique ability to co-ordinate large scale activities very effectively. However, not all situations within the UKPS require a command and control culture. For example, when making routine enquiries, officers may have more information than their superior which allows them to suggest a more sensible course of action. The lack of time pressure means that superiors have the opportunity to gather more information to help make their decision. The varied nature of policing activities indicates that upward challenge can sometimes be very useful. The findings have showed that the relationship with the superior is not always perceived to be formal because some decisions can be legitimately challenged. The variation in perception of relationship with superior could be underpinned by the different types of policing activities and the time pressure under which officers and their superiors are expected to comply.

When considering the role of formal communication, the situational nature of perceived formality was highlighted by three characteristics; record, content and audience. The three were applied differentially by participants across communication channels. For example, from the superior's perspective, a conversation between themselves and an officer could start off as informal, because they were having a non-work-related conversation, then they might start talking about work, which meant the conversation would become formal. However, from the officer's perspective, they might consider the entire conversation to be formal because any conversation with a superior is formal, regardless of the content.

The participants also described that when they recognised that they had more expertise and experience than their superior, they felt more powerful. In these situations, it is possible that officers would have a greater propensity for upward challenge because they were confident that they had important information to share. Although studies have shown that where leaders felt more powerful they were more likely to verbally dominate a conversation (Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2013) and less likely to listen to advice from followers (Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012), there are very few studies that have looked at the effects of feelings of power in followers and how this makes a difference to their propensity to voice.

Hierarchical Level. Perceived formality can be understood to be situational by viewing the differences in perceived formality by hierarchical level. Perceived formality did appear to be different at different levels of the organisation, with more senior participants considering more formal communication channels than less senior officers. The participants offered some insight into this phenomenon when they explained that as they became more senior, they became more aware of the expectations of the public and the responsibility that they held as a police officer. From a theoretical perspective, this can be explained by using social identification theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Social identification theory argues that over time, as individuals become more socialised into an organisation, their self-concept is extended to incorporate values of the organisation. Therefore, they start to act in ways that reflect the values of the organisation (Ashforth, 1985). A study by Horton and colleagues found that those at the most senior levels of the British Navy identified more closely with the organisation than the lower ranks who identified more closely with their personal career. Furthermore, those at the lower ranks identified more strongly with their personal career than with the organisation.

The British Navy has a structure very similar to the UKPS in that there are nine hierarchical levels which are formally and clearly demarcated by rank. Seven hundred and

eighty-nine staff across ten ships and from all ranks apart from the most senior rank were asked to fill out self-report surveys to understand whether they identified more with the organisation (The Royal Navy or their ship), their functional group (team) or their personal career. A personal career focus is where an individual identifies with their own career, more than with the goals of the organisation, and a functional group identification is where a subordinate identifies with their immediate working team, rather than with their own personal goals, or the organisation as a whole.

The present study found that Chief Inspectors viewed more formality than all other ranks in the sample and that perceptions of formality increased as participants became more senior. When compared to the study by Horton and colleagues (2014), the four lower ranks were included in the sample. Where individuals identify with the organisation, they are more likely to carry out activities that are congruent with the organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, it is possible that organisationally-provided channels of communication, might be more likely to be viewed as formal by those identifying more strongly with the organisation because they are aware of the risk attracted by voicing in those situations.

It is likely that the definition of a formal relationship with superior is representative of the strong hierarchical situation within the UKPS. There are not many other organisations with the exception of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Royal Airforce) with such tall hierarchies and clearly delineated rank structures. Organisations where a minimum level of service is expected are more likely to have the ability to coerce subordinates into carrying out actions that they are not happy with as they are unable to leave. According to Exit, Voice and Loyalty theory (Hirschman, 1970), where there are high barriers to exit, subordinates might be unwilling to voice their dissatisfaction, knowing that there are no alternatives available to them. Although it is possible to exit the UKPS, there are few similar occupations to the

UKPS so officers will be mindful of this fact before speaking out and making themselves unpopular.

Promotion. The findings section also showed that whether an officer was interested in promotion was likely to have shaped their propensity to challenge upwards. Sixteen out of the nineteen participants in the present study were at the rank of Sergeant or above, indicating that promotion had been or still was important to them during their career. When an officer was considering promotion, situations where their superior was not willing to listen to challenge were likely to have been perceived as formal because further attempts at challenge could be perceived as inappropriate, causing the superior to use their influence to negatively shape their career progression. On the other hand, officers who had stepped off “the promotion treadmill” appeared less concerned about the effects of perceived formality because promotion was not their main aim, yet they were still mindful of the fact that challenging upwards might still limit opportunities for them to develop their career in other ways. One of the participants was due to retire from the force in 10 days and he was probably the only participant who described feeling completely free to challenge.

Summary. Section 7.1 explained how the perceived formality of upward challenge was likely to change depending on the characteristics that were identified and the extent to which the superior was willing to listen to challenge about a particular decision. The situational nature of perceived formality could also be explained by considering that command and control nature of policing was not required for all policing activities, therefore indicating that upward challenge was likely to be considered more acceptable in some situations than others. The findings also identified that perceptions of formality were also defined by elements of organisational culture, such as the strong requirement for career progression that was expected for all officers, minimum length of service and hierarchical role expectations. Finally, organisation design was shown to be a factor which was likely to

have contributed towards perceived formality because of the distance that it created between certain levels of officer and their superior. The next section will discuss the findings and highlight why upward challenge during situations of perceived formality is likely to be perceived as risky.

7.2 Perceived Formality Signals Upward Challenge is Risky

This dissertation examined how perceived formality shaped upward challenge in the UKPS. One key theme underpinning the voice and silence literature is that subordinates feel that voicing to a superior is risky (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Detert & Treviño, 2010) and risk was one of the reasons why subordinates remained silent (Milliken et al., 2003). The findings section highlighted that many participants were guarded in their approach to upward challenge. Guarded appeared to represent an awareness that challenging a superior was risky, especially using formal communication. Therefore, it can be said that the present study has identified that upward challenge under conditions of perceived formality was considered to be risky. Although, it was not possible to say whether perceived formality caused participants to be silent, it was possible to show that when participants felt less guarded, they were more likely to challenge. The risk appeared to be underpinned by concerns about career progression so upward challenge during times of perceived formality was a threat that participants were keen to avoid. This section will outline the ways that formal relationship with superior and formal communication presented risk when challenging upwards and will discuss the ways in which the risk shaped upward challenge.

Formal Communication. The use of a formal channel to challenge upwards may be perceived by the superior as provocative because of its potential to embarrass the superior, whereas the same conversation using informal communication might be perceived as non-confrontational and even supportive. (Klaas et al., 2012). The findings identified that three characteristics were used to differentiate between formal and informal communication situations. The three characteristics appeared to be used as a way of assessing the risk associated with challenging in a particular situation. For example, the organisational recording of a channel allowed sharing of the information so channels with an organisational record were perceived of as risky (Klaas et al., 2012). Furthermore, with the ability to be

shared comes the risk that others will hear what has been said which is likely to be undesirable when challenging a superior. The presence of an audience heightens the possibility of others sharing what has been said, therefore making meetings with audiences containing unknown attendees uncondusive to speaking up (audience). Where the content is work-related, there is more likelihood that speaking out of turn will be viewed unfavourably and could cause others to share the information (content). Table 14 has provided an indication of how risk might be determined by the three characteristics. The most high-risk situation was likely to be where there was a record of the conversation (record), it was about work rather than personal or social matters (content) and the audience was from outside of the immediate team (audience).

Table 14. *Characteristics and how they might map onto risk*

| Record | Content | Audience | Level of perceived risk when challenging |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|---|
| Y | W | UK | High |
| Y | W | K | Med |
| Y | NW | UK | Med |
| N | W | UK | Med |
| N | NW | UK | Med |
| Y | NW | K | Low |
| N | W | K | Low |
| N | NW | K | Low |

Legend: Record: Y = yes, N = no; Content: W = work-related, NW = not work-related; Audience: UK = unknown, K = known.

It is well documented that voice and silence is thought to be underpinned by risk and that subordinates are more likely to voice when they feel safe (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Edmondson, 2003; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Morrison, 2014). However, based on the present study findings that perceived formality is different for everyone, what constitutes formality and therefore identifies risk of upward challenge is likely to be different for each individual. Furthermore, it has been found that each organisation and superior is likely to have their own voice climate (Detert & Trevino, 2010) suggesting that within each organisation, there are likely to be different perceptions of the risk associated with formality when considering upward challenge.

Relationship with Superior. The findings section showed that the participants recognised a formal relationship with their superior in situations where they might use their influence to negatively shape the officer's career. Therefore, it was important to challenge in ways that were perceived as appropriate. Furthermore, it was identified that the perceived formality of the relationship with superior was considered to be most evident when the superior was not willing to listen to upward challenge. Therefore, upward challenge in these situations was considered to be risky.

The literature review identified that voice to a superior could be considered to be risky and as a result, participants described remaining silent (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003). The present study could therefore contribute to theoretical advancement by showing that upward challenge to a superior is likely to be considered risky mainly in situations where there is perceived formality, that is in situations where the superior is likely to use their authority to enforce their decision, or in situations where the superior is likely to use their influence to negatively shape their career.

Upward Challenge Strategies. The present study highlighted five strategies officers used to challenge upwards. The strategies included using facts rather than opinions, presenting solutions rather than problems, delaying the challenge until they had decided upon a suitable strategy or the timing was more appropriate, using tact and diplomacy to introduce the challenge slowly and respectfully, and challenging in private.

Section 7.1 highlighted that perceptions of formality were likely to be situational. Therefore, it is assumed that the use of upward challenge strategies is a response to situations which the participants perceived to be formal, and therefore risky. By viewing the strategies as a way of minimising the risk associated with the formality, it is possible to infer that upward challenge is more risky when done without the use of facts and solutions, whilst feeling emotional, when expressing oneself directly or done in a public place.

A number of strategies have been previously identified in the dissent and issue-selling literatures. These include direct-factual appeal, solution presentation, threatening resignation, circumvention, and repetition (Kassing, 2002). One hundred and thirty-five employees from a range of US public and private sector organisations provided open-ended responses to the following question: “Recall a time when you disagreed with workplace policies and practices and you decided to discuss your concerns with someone above you in the chain of command (e.g., supervisor, superior).” An interpretive thematic analysis of the responses indicated five strategies. Direct-factual appeal described the use of evidence, experience and facts to support an argument; solution presentation referred to the presentation of solutions instead of/or in addition to direct factual appeal; repetition described the repeated use of dissent based on non-action from superiors; circumvention involved speaking to a higher up; and threatening resignation represented a threat to leave the organisation.

Kassing (2005) found that subordinates used the direct-factual appeal most often and the solution presentation strategy next most frequently as these were considered to be the most competent ways in which to carry out dissent. A measure of competence was developed comprising eight items designed to capture subordinate views on the benefits and disadvantages of each strategy. For example, the measure of competence included the order in which strategies should be used (most competent was equal to the first strategy to be used), its suitability for dissenting about a range of topics, its perceived appropriateness and effectiveness and its ability to affect the relationship with the superior.

Redmond, Jameson and Binder (2016) went a step further to understand what effect LMX had on the types of strategies that subordinates would use. They found that those with high LMX were more likely to use a prosocial dissent tactic, that is one where subordinates go armed with facts and a possible solution. High LMX seems to reduce the threat associated with upward influence attempts. Waldron and colleagues (1993) found that subordinates who considered their relationship with their superior as high LMX were more likely to speak up than those with low LMX about both personal and organisational problems leading them to suggest that upward influence could have appeared more legitimate for organisational problems than for personal problems.

Impression management can be defined as “the process by which people control the impressions others form of them” (Leary & Kowalski, 1990 p.34). It has been highlighted as a response to situational threats and is therefore considered a likely response to perceived formality. For example, Sussman, Adams, Kuzmits and Raho (2002) suggested that impression management described how “an actor consciously constructs a persona to achieve maximum personal benefit given the situation he is in at that time” (p.315). In other words, impression management describes an individual’s attempt to present a favourable image to their superior. A favourable image of themselves can be presented in the organisation in one

of two ways; subordinates can act in particular ways in order to protect their own image, or, they can act in particular ways to protect the image of their superior (Goffman, 1959). By protecting the image of their superior, subordinates are able to demonstrate respect and loyalty, two aspects of relationship quality which are likely to enhance the trust between a subordinate and their superior, thereby reducing the risk of retaliation.

A subordinate needs to ensure that their superior has a favourable image of them if they are to be offered career development opportunities such a promotion or secondments, raises in salary or be accepted by other members of the organisation. A number of studies in the voice and silence literature have identified that subordinates often remain silent in order to avoid damaging the positive image that others might have of them because they are scared of the implications (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Treviño, 2010; Milliken et al., 2003).

It is argued that the greater the distance, the greater the face threat the superior and subordinate will feel when challenging upwards (Bisel et al., 2012). Therefore, speaking up to a superior who perceives themselves to be distant could be classed as a severe face threat. Given that distance underpinned perceptions of formality in the present study, in particular between the Inspectors and the Chief Inspectors, it could be that participants were conscious of the risk of face threat to their superior and therefore were careful not to offend superiors when expressing disagreement or challenge.

One way in which subordinates avoid face threat to a superior can be explained by looking at ingratiation theory. Ingratiation theory “proposes that those with a lower level of status habitually exaggerate the extent to which they agree with the opinions and actions of higher status people, as a means of acquiring influence with them” (Tourish & Robson, 2003 p.152). This means that subordinates do not always express their disagreement, or that when they do express their disagreement, they use a strategy in order to ensure that disagreeing is

done in an appropriate manner. Given the power differences that exist between subordinates and their superiors, Tourish (2005) argued that it was the power differentials that caused people to censor the expression of their views, suggesting that where subordinates indicate a formal relationship with their superior, impression management is likely to be high.

Another theory that has been used to explain how subordinates take part in impression management is politeness theory. Politeness theory can be understood as a way for subordinates to convey favourable impressions of themselves to others by speaking up in a socially acceptable and polite manner (Lee, 1993). Politeness theory argues that people will do everything they can to avoid painting themselves in a negative light and everything they can to paint themselves in a good light (Brown & Levinson, 1987). They do this through the use of strategies including remaining silent, speaking up directly, without reservation, explaining and engaging in discussion with the superior to help them understand the importance of the problem or appealing to a superior to help with a particular problem (Waldron, Hunt, & DSilva, 1993). The choice of strategy is thought to be influenced by three types of factors; contextual factors such as the relevance or extremity of the upward challenge, social factors such as the power of the listener over the communicator, the social distance between the subordinate and the superior, and individual differences such as gender (Lee, 1993).

The discussion will now consider each of the different types of strategies that were identified in order to understand how upward challenge might be shaped by perceived formality.

Facts and solutions. The use of facts rather than opinions and the presentation of solutions had been previously identified in the literature as two ways in which subordinates dissent upwards (Kassing & Kava, 2013; Kassing, 2002). Direct-factual appeal and solution

presentation have also been described as prosocial strategies. Subordinates reported using direct-factual appeal and solution presentation strategies more often than repetition, circumvention and threatening resignation (Kassing, 2009; Kassing, 2002, 2005). The reason that direct-factual and solution presentation appear to be used most often is because they are considered to be the most competent (Kassing & Kava, 2013). Competence can be understood as a method that reduces face threat, thereby reducing the risk of upward challenge (Kassing, 2005). It could be that the reduced face threat is the result of evidence to support the difference of opinion which removes the personal element of challenge. Furthermore, Garner (2012) found that direct factual appeal and solution presentation were considered both effective and appropriate by subordinates. Effective referred to the greater opportunity for a successful challenge attempt whereas appropriate meant that there was less risk attached to these types of strategies. Garner (2012) also found that direct factual appeal alone was found to be less effective because without a solution, the dissenter's goals may not have been achieved. This would suggest that subordinates challenge where their method of upward challenge is instrumental in order to give them the greatest chance of success.

The fact that officers in the present study have highlighted the use of prosocial strategies (direct-factual and solution presentation) can be considered positive as a previous study found that where subordinates reported using these strategies, it signalled that organisations were open to challenge (Kassing & Kava, 2013). The use of facts and solutions was also identified as an Implicit Voice Theory (IVT). Detert and Edmondson (2011) found that subordinates felt that voicing was risky unless facts and solutions were provided. The fact that participants described using facts and solutions to challenge upwards might therefore suggest that upward challenge was considered to be risky by officers and therefore, this was an acceptable way of challenging upwards. Furthermore, that the UKPS is open to upward challenge using these strategies because superiors feel less threatened and are therefore more

willing to encourage upward challenge in this way. When considering that an upward challenge strategy is the response to perceived formality, it can also be understood that the use of facts and solutions are likely to reduce the opportunity for superiors to enforce previously-made decisions, thereby limiting the level of risk associated with the challenge and increasing the chances of a successful challenge attempt.

Delay. The present study found two examples of delay. The first type of delay represented a conscious decision by the participant in response to a feeling that upward challenge was not appropriate at that time. The delay therefore was designed to give the participant the best chance of influencing their manager to change their mind by choosing a more appropriate situation. For example, MCI2 explained that challenging a superior in a meeting with an audience present had previously been unsuccessful. Therefore, the context in which voice takes place has been shown to be important when considering propensity for voice.

The second form of delay appeared to be an emotion-coping strategy allowing the participant to present a more rational and constructive form of challenge, rather than the emotionally charged one that might have taken place had a delay not been incurred. Support was found to show that where subordinates used emotion regulation strategies, that is to voice in a manner that gave the impression that the subordinate was in control, voice was considered to be more constructive by the superior (Grant, 2013). Where voice was viewed as constructive by the superior, it was likely to be viewed more positively, therefore having more positive outcomes for the subordinate (Burriss, Detert, & Romney, 2013). Therefore, it is possible to consider that a delay strategy was linked to impression management and the desire to challenge in a professional manner in order to be considered competent. Maybe more importantly, to avoid any negative impressions which may lead the superior to consider they are not worthy of promotion or further

career development opportunities. The strategy of delaying upward challenge highlights that subordinates do not necessarily resort to silence when their superior is discouraging challenge, but they find a more appropriate time at which to challenge.

“In Private”. Some of the participants highlighted that challenging their superior in private was the best way to challenge. There appeared to be two reasons for this. Firstly, this allowed the officer to have a conversation with their superior which was not recorded, therefore preventing it from being shared and reducing the risk associated with upward challenge. One of the reasons participants preferred to challenge behind closed doors was that they could be more open and speak directly to their superior. This appeared to be possible because of the reduced risk of others hearing what had been said, thereby reducing the risk of face threats for both officer and their superior. This lack of face threat also seemed to suggest that the officer and the superior could act more naturally with each other, rather than needing to resort to formal role expectations where power differences characterised the relationship.

A second reason that officers preferred to challenge behind closed doors was that the participants felt that superiors were more willing to listen to their views when in private. This was likely to be because where there was no audience, the superior felt less threatened and was more open to considering other options. A number of conceptual models about voice and silence are based on the assumption that superiors are reluctant to receive or encourage negative feedback from subordinates which is likely to cause subordinates to remain silent (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Mowbray et al., 2014).

The role of the physical setting in shaping subordinate behaviour has been acknowledged as important although it has received very little attention in the literature and is therefore not well understood (Ashforth, 1985). However, the importance of

understanding the impact of the physical setting on perceptions of formality is likely be important when considering its impact on upward challenge. For example, Detert and Trevino (2010) found that subordinates did not like speaking up in a formal setting. This might be because in hierarchical organisations, subordinates are aware of the need to preserve the public image of their superior (Bisel et al., 2012).

Dutton and Ashford (1993) argued that the issue selling process had far greater impact if it was done in a way that fitted in with the cultural norms of the organisation. That is, if a formal attempt to sell an issue is required, then the issue will gain more support if it is presented in a formal manner. Similarly, if the prevailing culture of the organisation prefers informal issue-selling attempts, then an informal challenge will gain more credibility. The absence of an organisational record and an audience, two characteristics identified as representative of formal communication, could suggest that officers perceived challenging in private as informal, indicating that upward challenge in the UKPS could be culturally more acceptable when done informally.

It has been suggested that subordinates who are willing to share their views in public should be rewarded for commitment to upholding ethical values (Shahinpoor & Matt, 2007). Upward challenge in public has the potential to demonstrate ethical values are being adhered to by giving superiors the opportunity to explain their decisions to a wider audience. Therefore, where challenge takes place in a public place, it can be viewed as positive. However, the present study showed that upward challenge was likely to take place in private, predominantly in order to maintain the reputations of the officers and their superiors. Unfortunately, this could suggest that some decisions are not capable of standing up against ethical scrutiny, and it could help to explain why the UKPS has been plagued by a number of scandals over recent years.

On the other hand, it has been argued where issue-selling took place in public, there was a greater likelihood of senior management paying more attention to the issue because of the increased pressure that the senior managers would feel to act from the audience (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). However, it was also acknowledged that raising an issue in a public forum could be risky for the seller because if their issue was not accepted by senior management as important, their credibility as a subordinate worth listening to might be impaired. Therefore, raising issues in private might be less risky for the subordinate because their credibility would not be impaired to the same extent if their issue was rejected.

Tact and Diplomacy. Tact and diplomacy is an oft-used phrase which largely refers to a form of negotiation and influencing (Shell, 2001) but which has its roots in deception aimed at achieving a particular means (Heyd, 1995). Each of the strategies identified in the study can be viewed as examples of tact and diplomacy because they were all designed to reduce face threat by presenting information in a particular way. Tact has been identified as a strategy used by subordinates to maintain relationships with a superior (Bisel et al., 2012).

Policing Context. The context of the UKPS is worthy of exploration at this stage to highlight the importance of relationships and why this might be a strong factor in shaping upward challenge. There is a requirement and an expectation that police officers sign up for a minimum length of 35 years. This is driven by the pension benefits process which means the pension can only be accessed after this time (Hanson Management Wealth & Police Federation, 2016). The lack of alternative similar employment is likely to mean that police officers remain with the UKPS throughout their whole career until the time when they can draw their pension. There are 45 police forces in the UK but most police officers will remain with the same police force for the duration of their career, mainly because they live in the area and the force they work in is the most suitable. It is possible to apply to join a different

force but previous conduct will be taken into account, meaning it is might be difficult for officers with prior complaints to move forces (Police Scotland, 2016). Working with the same officers, potentially for 35 years means that it is likely to be very important to maintain good relations, especially where superiors have the power to limit career progression.

Section 7.2 has shown that upward challenge was considered to be risky and the use of strategies appeared to be a way of minimising the risk. The risk was presented by the perceived formality of situations where formal communication was being used or where the superior was unwilling to listen. The next section will appraise the view that upward challenge seemed to become more effortful under situations of perceived formality.

7.3 Perceived Formality Increases Effort Required for Upward Challenge

Section 7.1 in the discussion identified that perceived formality was situational. The situations that were most likely to be perceived as formal included those where the superior used their authority to enforce action, situations which might give cause to the superior to use their greater influence to negatively shape career progression, or upward challenge situations using formal communication. Furthermore, perceptions of formality were likely to be shaped by the level of hierarchy, promotion aspirations and organisation design.

Section 7.2 demonstrated that upward challenge in formal situations could be risky, which resulted in participants describing five upward challenge strategies that participants used to minimise the level of risk. Given that upward challenge was considered to be risky, some participants describing preferring to remain silent instead of challenging, suggesting that perceived formality might have the ability to shape both upward challenge and silence.

This section will demonstrate that an individual's desire to put in the effort required to challenge upwards in formal situations is likely to explain the difference between upward challenge and silence. Effort can be understood as an activity which is difficult and therefore requires more energy and attention than an activity that might be considered easy. Effort is considered to be one of many costs associated with upward challenge (Zhan & Hample, 2016). Each of the five upward challenge strategies presented above can be considered to be effortful. For example, to present facts and solutions, information will need to be gathered beforehand which is likely to take time. The delay described by one participant was needed to think of a number of options before assessing which may be the best in order to ensure the challenge was both appropriate and effective. The time taken to calm emotions before challenging will require strong emotion regulation. Being tactful and diplomatic is likely to require patience and restraint to avoid being overly direct. However, it is the strategy of "in

private” that is considered to be of most interest in the present study and most likely to represent the effort required to challenge upwards.

As explained in the findings chapter, the potential for four forms of distance to shape the relationship between officers and their superiors was identified, particularly between the levels of Inspector and Chief Inspector. Where geographical and temporal distance existed, officers were most likely to rely on communication channels such as email, telephone or video conference to speak to each other. These channels were predominantly identified as formal in the card sort activity, suggesting that there was a high likelihood that upward challenge using these communication channels would be considered risky. The link between distance, relationship quality and communication was identified in section 7.1 showing that where subordinates and their superiors had limited interaction with each other, opportunities to interact informally were unlikely to be created. The strategy “in private” could be defined as informal communication in that there was no record and no audience. However, where informal communication opportunities did not exist, officers would need to go out of their way to create a situation where they could have an “in private” conversation with their superior.

The reasons why participants may or may not have made the effort to speak “in private” to their superior can be understood using the cost-benefit ratio. The cost-benefit ratio has been understood as the way in which an individual weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of challenging upwards. Example costs might include reduced possibility of promotion, time spent preparing or engaging in challenge, likelihood of success or perceived effectiveness and appropriateness. The costs and benefits for each individual are likely to be different according to the specific upward challenge situation (Zhan & Hample, 2016).

Zahn and Hample (2016) argued that the organisational context is the most important consideration in understanding what shapes upward challenge. There were a number of examples of evidence of the cost-benefit ratio being used to shape decisions to challenge in the present study. For example, MI7 delayed because she realised that her attempt at challenge would not be perceived as constructive and would therefore have less chance of being successful so she decided to wait. MCI2 also explained choosing a better time because his experience had taught him that having a strong argument supported by facts, and done in a private was likely to be more successful. It is possible that a number of other participants decided not to challenge because they felt that the costs outweighed the benefits.

The strategy of “in private” emerged from the data analysis as a way of challenging yet minimising the risk. However, challenging upwards in private could pose some problems for officers within the UKPS where it was highlighted that spending time face to face with a superior was difficult owing to geographical and temporal distance. Therefore, it could be that opportunities for upward challenge were missed because the costs were felt to outweigh the benefits. On the other hand, it was not clear from the present study whether restricted opportunity to challenge in private was likely to lead to challenge taking place using a channel such as email or telephone. Given the costs associated with upward challenge using formal communication, one factor that might shape the channel used for upward challenge was the perceived urgency of the challenge. It could be that depending on the urgency of the challenge, the only way to challenge might have been using a recorded channel, for example through email or telephone. Alternatively, it could be that where it was difficult for the officers to speak to their superior in private, they might be more likely to challenge in public.

One participant, MI1, in the present study explained that they had challenged using email because they were off duty at the time, and email was the most appropriate method of challenge at that time. This could suggest that where the challenge is felt to be important,

officers might be willing to risk challenging using a formal channel. There has been very limited research that has studied the role of upward challenge using formal communication channels. Hastings and Payne (2013) identified two rules that subordinates who used email to dissent adhered to. Firstly, that they should be careful when committing things to writing because the message could be shared, and secondly, that communication must be appropriate and professional, that is free from emotion, sent only to the appropriate people and used only for topics which don't need to be discussed face to face. Another study found that people with low LMX were more likely to dissent through email whereas people with high LMX were more likely to dissent face to face (Turnage & Goodboy, 2016). In the present study, MI1 described having an excellent relationship with his superior and it could therefore be that where a face to face exchange was not possible, the excellent relationship he had with his superior might have led him to consider that challenging by email was not anymore risky than challenging "in private". Turnage and Goodboy (2016) suggested that their study was the first to find evidence to show that poor relationship quality did not necessarily lead to less upward challenge as was previously suggested, but that upward challenge was still likely to take place but through email.

The present study identified that where face to face methods were effortful because of geographical or temporal distance, it was possible that upward challenge would take place using email. However, in contrast to the finding by Turnage and Goodboy (2016) that low LMX led to greater use of email, the present study might indicate that a high quality relationship with superior will encourage use of formal communication channels such as email where situations prevent face to face upward challenge.

Summary

The cost-benefit ratio has been found to be extremely important. Zahn and Hample (2016) found that people's decision to dissent was entirely based on the cost-benefit assessment and therefore dissent was wholly situational. The likelihood of success was the most influential factor so superiors should readily accept all forms of dissent. They argued that most of the dissent literature should now be reconsidered in the light of the cost-benefit assessment.

7.4 Reflexivity

Bryman (2008) argued that the values of a researcher can shape all areas of a research study, from the original choice of topic, the choice of method and the conclusions drawn. Value identification is very difficult and values can often remain hidden until the point when they become compromised, and then values become apparent by the choices one makes. I believe that my values became apparent to me throughout the PhD process even though they may have driven some of my previous career choices. Prior to doing a PhD, I worked between 2004 and 2012 as a management consultant specialising in change implementation. My time was spent almost exclusively working in large, hierarchical organisations in both the public and private sector, working with subordinates at the lowest levels of organisations helping to identify workable solutions, often with the aim of reducing operational cost. My love of management consulting was borne out of the fact that when an organisation is paying upwards of £1000 per day for a consultant, senior superiors listen to what is being told to them.

For four years prior to becoming a management consultant, I worked as an operations manager in a brewery logistics organisation. My reason for leaving was a growing dissatisfaction with the “make do and mend” attitude by which operations teams are managed. Far from the glamour of departments such as sales and marketing, where superiors routinely enjoy entertaining clients at corporate events, receive a top-end company car so they can arrive in style, and sometimes a clothing budget to ensure they look professional, operations superiors start work at 5am, spend their day in cheap polyester trousers and fleece jackets scrabbling around in dirty warehouses looking for “lost” stock. A trip to a customer entails hitching a ride in a twenty-year old articulated lorry smelling of beer, a visit to a dank and dark cellar to inspect the cleanliness of the lines connecting the kegs to the pumps, a pub landlord who usually has a complaint about

the time of their weekly delivery and a ride home with a drayman reminding you that they earn three times your salary because of all the overtime they are getting. As a manager, overtime is not paid, but extra hours are still required because of the inefficiencies in the operation. The situation is not helped by the lack of investment in new trucks, delivery equipment and IT systems. Hence, operations managers spend most of their time “fire-fighting”, a colloquial term for making sure everything runs as smoothly as possible given the large number of constraints under which operations departments work.

Senior managers did not seem interested in alleviating the 5am starts, flat tyres, customer complaints and long hours, and I could not understand why. My view has always been that operations are equally as important as any other part of the business but the commitment and hard work of operations managers which drives them to succeed, means their problems are often overlooked by senior managers. I was fed up of not having my concerns taken seriously and I felt that life should not be like this so I decided to go into a profession where I knew I would be listened to and planned to help those who were in similar positions to myself previously.

As a management consultant, I quickly earned myself a reputation as someone who could talk to front-line staff at client sites and find out what their problems and concerns were. As a consultant, my internal managers were impressed by my ability to develop workable solutions and help clients implement them. With a consultant on their side, front-line staff were able to make changes that they had been trying to get implemented for years. This is what I’d wanted to achieve by becoming a consultant and I felt I was making a big difference.

Each consultancy project typically lasted six months and over this period sustainability measures would be developed and implemented, with the aim of improving

the situation permanently for the existing staff who would still be working there. Sometimes, the sustainability measures worked, and sometimes (mostly) they didn't. Over the eight years I was a consultant, I realised that the client was often left with similar problems to those they had had before. In other words, superiors ceased to listen to their problems once the project had finished. I left consultancy in the end because of the prolonged periods of time working away from home and the toll I feared it would take on my long-term health. However, I remained frustrated by the endemic problem in organisations where subordinates, without the help of a consultant often continued to be ignored.

I applied for the ESRC/SAMS/UKCES Management and Business Development Fellowship scheme in February 2012. The scheme was aimed at bringing business practitioners into academia to raise awareness of practical issues through teaching and research, hence improving the practical impact of academic research. The scope of my PhD was flexible initially so I spent nine months deciding upon the topic, eventually deciding to focus on voice and silence. The paper that introduced me to this area was recommended to me by a friend. The paper was about Implicit Voice Theories by Detert and Edmondson (2011). Ironically, my friend didn't think much of this paper or the topic, but for me, that paper signalled the beginnings of my PhD thesis.

The PhD process has tested me as an individual in many ways. I knew that in order to sustain three or four years of study, I needed to find a topic that I was passionate about. I hadn't realised the depth of my desire to provide subordinates with a voice before. In fact, I have realised that I want everyone to have a voice, but that's a longer term goal! As I carried on along my academic journey, I felt saddened by the sheer amount of research that there is that practitioners don't have access to. Academics know so much about the reasons subordinates don't have a voice, why superiors don't listen,

and senior managers often remain ignorant of what is really troubling those at the lowest levels of organisations, but yet, practitioners and in particular consultants, do their best using very little academic evidence to support their views. I set about sharing my knowledge by giving talks, internally at first within the University and then externally, through the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences. I was reassured by the interest shown in the topic and this propelled me further to make sure my thesis answered a real question. When I say real question, I meant one that answered a problem for practitioners. However, I realise now that by asserting what I felt to be real at that time, I was viewing academia as a pseudo-real activity, something which had little value within the practitioner world.

As a practitioner in an academic world, I found it very difficult to take anything seriously which did not have a direct practical application. Over a period of about twelve months, during the third year of my PhD, I became very disillusioned with academia, realising that the questions academics ask are often tangential to those that practitioners ask. I realised that one of the reasons why some practitioners find it so hard to engage with academic material might be because it doesn't fit with their view of what's important. This was the darkest time of the PhD process where I realised that I wanted to provide answers to help subordinates find a voice, but I wasn't sure whether what I was doing would help. I questioned very heavily the point of academia and the decision I had made to leave consultancy in search of answers which I didn't know if I would be able to find. In retrospect, I now realise that this period of time helped me work out who I was and what I wanted to stand for. I emerged from my disillusionment understanding that I would always be able to see life from a dual perspective. This meant that I could understand the value of academia in its ability to produce evidence-based research, but also understood how practitioners might wish to see the material and make sense of it. I

believe this has provided me with a unique perspective on the world, as I have the ability to produce research that answers the types of questions that practitioners ask. In fact, when I presented my findings to the project sponsors at the police force, they thanked me for making my research so applicable for them, enabling them to see the implications of my research straight away.

The PhD has helped me to understand my values and how they have shaped this research. I believe my values stand for a desire for everyone to be viewed as equal and given the opportunity for their problems and concerns to be heard. I believe that academia has the ability to address practitioner problems, and that my research will always seek to unravel mysteries primarily identified from a practitioner perspective. This PhD was therefore designed using abductive reasoning. However, I recognise that having this perspective has had its difficulties for me and the writing up of this PhD has highlighted a number of them.

Firstly, I initially used a consultancy approach to analyse the data, rather than an academic one. I believe that my experience as a management consultant has given me the skill to generate themes from large amounts of data to identify areas of commonality which are likely to be important to the problem being investigated. However, management consultancy does not require the rigour of academic research to show where the themes have come from. In other words, I forgot that I was doing a piece of robust, scientific academic research. I have my supervisors to thank for identifying that deficiency in my data analysis approach. Some of my initial conclusions were changed as a result of this process of re-analysis and for that, I feel that my research is now stronger.

Secondly, in my quest to find answers for the practitioner, I forgot about the need to use theory to interpret my data. Again, as a practitioner, the focus of consultancy is

less about understanding the problem and more about finding a solution. This is mainly driven by the reduced timeframes available to analyse data. As a result, my confirmation report and the first few drafts of my PhD findings largely contained practical implications. Hence, it's easy to understand why the police force found my findings and suggestions very practical. The process of re-analysing my data and using theory to make sense of the findings has been very satisfying as I have been able to link the literature that I spent many years reading to what I had found during my data collection. I realise now that my fundamental lack of appreciation about academic research and the theory that underpins it probably caused the problems I had in my third year where I struggled to understand how academic research could ever begin to start answering practitioner problems. I now believe that I have entered a deeper ontological understanding of life as a result of being truly confused about whether practitioner problems were more important than academic problems. Of course, I think the answer to that question is impossible to answer, but I recognise that only by becoming confused do I truly appreciate the nature of the world because I had to find a way to make sense of it.

Each individual has the potential to introduce bias into the research process as a result of their experience and values. However, Plummer (1995) suggested that bias could be present in either the participant, the researcher or the interaction between the two. He argued it is therefore important for the researcher to differentiate the views of the participants and the views of the researcher during the data analysis process. In order to ensure that the reader has a clear view of the participants' responses and is able to differentiate them from mine, the data analysis section has described as clearly as possible the way in which the participant data was gathered. Furthermore, the findings chapter has attempted to present the data collected during the interviews with as little interpretation as possible. The aim of the interpretation is to make sense of the findings in order to answer

the research question, as the data in its raw form may not have been directly linked to the research question. The section on data analysis has presented the coding process and provided some examples of how the descriptive codes became interpretative codes.

Despite the fact that research might be biased, Tracy (2010) argued that the role of reflexivity strengthened the quality of research by bringing vulnerability, honesty and transparency to the research process. By doing so, the qualitative researcher, through self-reflexivity, would be able to bring to the fore the “shielded or hidden” things that are often overlooked in quantitative research. I was committed to an inductive process of data analysis and therefore I coded everything that I noticed. In hindsight, this was a very messy and time consuming way of doing data analysis and I found myself completely overwhelmed by the number of codes and memos on how I thought things linked together. In fact, I was so confused I remember a conversation with one of my supervisors where I said that I didn’t think I’d found anything of interest at all. In retrospect, I now believe the messy coding process enabled me to identify factors and concepts which might have otherwise been overlooked, in particular the contextual factors which appear to have contributed towards creating perceptions of formality. Parker (2004) argued that reflexivity enables the researcher to take into account additional influences on the research findings, situating them in a particular cultural or economic context. Without my inductive coding, contextual factors would certainly not have been identified as themes because the participants themselves were not necessarily aware of their influence. The obvious theme here is that of distance, which was a wholly interpretative theme.

When considering bias introduced by participants, Cassell and Symon (2004) highlighted that when interviewing individuals with a high status within an organisation, especially those who command respect from others, it is possible that they may provide

only “surface-level “answers to questions and therefore the depth of their conversation will remain “shallow” (p.19). I felt that a number of the Inspector and Chief Inspector participants I interviewed provided very censored responses. I think they would have described themselves as being guarded. One participant informed me, after the tape recorder had been switched off, that he had only provided responses that he would be happy for the Deputy Chief Constable to hear. This meant that he had not been totally honest about all of his responses. What concerned me most was that I felt up until that point, that he had been the most genuine in his responses of all of the participants.

Although this participant was the only one to be so open about his reticence to provide me with completely truthful answers, I felt that a number of other participants had avoided answering questions about their superior’s communication style and receptiveness to being challenged. This did not become apparent until the data analysis process, where I realised that some of the participants had said they didn’t challenge their superiors, thereby limiting the scope of conversation I could have with them about their superior.

Although I did try to revisit the topic with them later on, I found them unyielding in their responses. One further participant told me that he viewed my research as a formal process due to the fact that he did not know me. Formality, as I came to learn throughout the process of my research produced only responses that were considered appropriate within the organisation. For example, talk positively about a superior or don’t talk about them at all. I consider their lack of openness as evidence of tact and diplomacy. However, it is important to point out that not everyone appeared to provide me with shallow and surface-level responses. One participant in particular having only two weeks left until retirement was not concerned that his responses would make him unpopular and provided me with a very honest insight into his views on his superior. The UKPS is a professional organisation where its subordinates are used to avoiding giving information to those that

they do not believe have a right to know it. Therefore, the irony of investigating voice and silence in an organisation that professionally practices tact and diplomacy was not lost on me, and does present a barrier to understanding how voice and silence takes place.

There might have been some areas where I introduced bias which shaped either the participants' responses or my interpretation and analysis of their responses.

Firstly, carrying out research in a police environment is known to present additional barriers for a non-police officer. This may have affected the way in which participants viewed me as an individual. Brown (1996 as cited in Reiner, 2000, p.222) would have described me as an "outside outsider", that is someone who was not employed or commissioned by the police to carry out research on their behalf, but wished to do so anyway. This represented the highest barrier to access and no way of mandating formal police co-operation, leaving me in a potentially difficult position. However, Reiner (2000) stated that "outside-outsider" research had proliferated over the last 30 years suggesting that barriers to access are surmountable. In fact, I gained access to the police force with very few problems and found them to be unfailingly supportive. This might have been because I was introduced to the police force through an alumnus of the University which might have facilitated access.

Secondly, I did not receive the full quota of Chief Inspector participants. I had originally asked for eight and I only received five. Furthermore, only one out of the five Chief Inspectors who did take part in the interviews turned up for the focus group, meaning that it couldn't go ahead. The Continuous Improvement officer suggested that levels of competition might have prevented them from wanting to share information with each other. As highlighted by Cassell and Symon (2004), a group of Chief Inspectors was an unnatural group as they very rarely met together, so this would have been an unfamiliar

occasion for them, one which they might have felt very uncomfortable about. As a result, it is likely that the process might have felt formal, given the presence of an unknown audience. Although I did not record the focus group, they wouldn't have known that beforehand so that might have been an influencing factor too. The competitive promotion process would have meant that officers were reluctant to share any information with their peer level colleagues which might have given others an opportunity to present better evidence at the promotion panel for the next level, Superintendent.

Finally, as a female researcher, it was possible that the male police officers talked to me differently than they would talk to each other. Bennett (2011) highlighted the masculine culture that existed within the Police Service and how male police officers were likely to behave differently. Williams and Heikes (1993) found that male participants were more likely to open up to women researchers rather than male researchers, because they found it easier to talk about their feelings and emotions with a female. This might suggest that I had found out different types of things than if a male researcher had asked the same questions.

The process of reflexivity during this research has helped me to question assumptions that I made during the data collection and analysis process which are likely to have influenced the way I have carried out this study. I recognise that my values are likely to have played a large role in choosing the topic of upward challenge and my choice of participating organisation. Nevertheless, I feel that engaging with the reflexive process has provided insight, not only into myself, but into the way that studies into upward challenge need to be managed to overcome the inherent bias some participants will have in talking to a researcher about their experiences.

Chapter Eight Conclusions

Introduction

The present study had one main research question which was to understand how perceived formality shaped upward challenge. In order to make sense of perceived formality, two further research questions aimed to establish a working definition of formality before drawing conclusions about its influence over upward challenge. It was considered possible for perceived formality to be created in the relationship with superior or in the communication channels used to challenge the superior.

The findings showed that a formal relationship with superior was defined as one where power differentials were most obvious. Power was most obvious when the superior used their authority to enforce a decision, meaning that upward challenge was unsuccessful. Power was also most evident when the superior was viewed as having the potential to negatively influence the career progression of an officer. The use of influence was considered most likely to happen when the upward challenge attempt was perceived as inappropriate by the superior. The theme of promotion appeared heavily throughout the interviews and focus group as a main driver of voice behaviour, in particular upward challenge.

When considering how perceived formality shaped upward challenge, two possible outcomes were identified; remaining silent or engaging in upward challenge. Officers who engaged in upward challenge described five strategies that they used to minimise the risk of the superior negatively influencing other's perceptions of them and affecting their potential for career progression.

Not only was challenge to a superior considered to be risky where the power differentials were most evident, but the use of formal communication channels to speak to

a superior was also found to be risky. Three characteristics were used by participants to identify formal communication: record, audience and content. However, only three channels were recognised as formal by all participants suggesting that the characteristics were applied differentially by the participants. Participants described being guarded when speaking to their superior using formal communication channels, and as a result, one of the strategies that they used to challenge was “in private”. “In private” meant without a record or an audience, suggesting that challenging in private was not considered to be a formal channel.

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the context in which the participants worked was also an important influence over the way they viewed formality. The organisational design of the UKPS was identified as a potential influence over perceptions of formality for two reasons. Firstly, where officers and their superiors experienced forms of distance as a result of geographical differences in working location and shift working (temporal distance), their main methods of communication were predominantly identified as formal in the card sort activity. Secondly, where the focus of officers’ roles was different from that of their superiors, either in terms of daily tasks or a longer-term focus on strategy or tactics, the need for interaction between them was reduced. The forms of distance were found to be greatest between Inspectors and Chief Inspectors, indicating that perceived formality might have the greatest influence over upward challenge at these levels.

Three theoretical underpinnings were found to be helpful in understanding how perceived formality shaped upward challenge amongst the participants in the present study. Firstly, formality was likely to be situational and therefore it would be difficult to predict when individuals might perceive formality without understanding the individuals and the environment in which they work. However, the case study nature of this research

has shown that it is possible to identify certain aspects of organisational culture which are likely to identify situations where individuals will feel like they are having formal conversations. Secondly, formal situations were likely to feel risky for the subordinate which was shown to result in either silence, or the use of an upward challenge strategy designed to minimise the risk. Finally, the organisation design of the UKPS was identified as a potential source of distance primarily between Inspectors and Chief Inspectors which was likely to have increased the effort required to challenge upwards.

The conclusion chapter will present an overview of the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, strengths and limitations, suggestions for further research and a few concluding remarks are presented.

8.1 Theoretical Contributions

The discussion has linked the findings with the literature in order to identify the contributions that the present study has made. The thesis brought together the voice and silence literature and the communication literature and highlighted how the field of voice and silence can be strengthened by focusing on the type of questions that practitioners might ask of the literature. For example, the question at the root of this research was “how do subordinates know when they’re having a formal conversation with their superior and how does this shape upward challenge?” A practitioner focus is interested in investigating problems that have practical suggestions for how organisations can better understand upward challenge. In asking research questions that seek to answer practitioner problems, the researcher is forced to engage with the literature in ways that may not have been considered using following research questions which have been identified through gaps in the literature alone. This process, known as abduction, forces the researcher to consider the practical relevance of the literature first, rather than the theoretical relevance. Nevertheless, the present study had made a number of theoretical

contributions. Table 15 provides an overview of the main theoretical contributions of this study and the following section will summarise them. Together, these contributions have highlighted some theoretical assumptions that currently exist in the voice and silence literature and provided some insight into how these assumptions may need to be modified in the light of evidence provided by the present study. Furthermore, suggestions have been made for how theory can be advanced in the light of new knowledge (Whetten, 1989).

Table 15. *An overview of the theoretical contributions of this study*

| | | Theoretical Contributions |
|------------------|-----|---|
| Relationship | R1 | It is possible that a high quality relationship with superior can exist independent of views of formal relationship |
| Communication | C1 | Individuals perceived of formality differently, therefore there is not a consistent view of formal communication channels |
| | C2 | Formal communication represented risk when considering upward challenge |
| | C3 | More senior officers viewed more of the communication channels as formal |
| Upward Challenge | UC1 | Challenge was unlikely to take place using formal communication channels |

R1) It is possible that a high quality relationship with superior can exist independent of views of formal relationship

In order to understand how an officer recognised that they were having a formal conversation with their superior, the first research question attempted to establish when officers felt that the relationship with their superior was formal. It was found that the relationship with the superior felt most formal when the superior forced the officers to comply with a decision with which the officer disagreed. However, the present study showed that it was possible to have a good relationship with a superior whilst also recognising that there were times when superiors would need to enforce action, considered in the LMX literature as a supervision exchange.

Studies have shown that where a good relationship with superior exists, measured using LMX theory, propensity to voice is greater (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008). However, where feelings of power distance are high, propensity to voice is lower (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Huang et al., 2005). Recent studies have shown that where high LMX and high power distance exists, propensity to voice is lower than when high LMX and low power distance exists (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). The present study might have found an explanation for this by showing that in a command and control organisation, characterised by a tall hierarchy and centralised decision-making, and characteristic of a high power distance culture, the likelihood of superiors having to enforce action might be a more frequent occurrence than in other less hierarchical organisations.

This finding has an implication for theoretical development. It may no longer be sufficient to measure the effect of LMX on upward challenge without considering the effects of power distance. The present study has shown that where officers felt there was a limited chance of success, officers were unlikely to challenge once they had been told that there was no negotiation on the course of action. This would suggest that there could be an optimum level of LMX in climates of high power distance that encourages upward

challenge. This means that high relationship quality might not encourage challenge where there is also a high power distance because the subordinate knows there is a limited chance of success.

The current voice and silence literature, although limited in nature, has to date encouraged superiors to focus on building informal relationships with their subordinates to encourage them to voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Marchington & Suter, 2013).

However, the present study identifies that high relationship quality may not always be a guarantee of upward challenge. Furthermore, despite the fact that the LMX literature acknowledges that the relationship between a superior and their subordinate will be unique, the voice and silence literature has not acknowledged this concept. A greater understanding of the uniqueness of each superior-subordinate relationship can be gained by highlighting the importance of perception and the way that different factors influence perceptions of formality differently, causing some to perceive more risk than others.

Recommendations for future studies therefore suggest that measures of LMX are no longer used solely to indicate propensity to voice. The measure of power distance is an indicator of the organisational context in which the study is being carried out and therefore also an important indicator on the extent to which a subordinate will challenge a superior. However, it is not clear if LMX or PD is a more important influence than the other, but an understanding of when these are likely to be important may hold implications for the extent that superiors build relationships with subordinates. Finally, qualitative descriptors of relationship with superior are very scarce but the present study has indicated how important it might be for helping to understand how generalizable the results of some of the larger scale quantitative studies may be.

C1) Individuals perceived of formality differently, therefore there is not a consistent view of formal communication channels

The present study found that when asked to characterise a number of communication channels as either formal or informal, only three out of eleven channels categorised by all participants were categorised as formal. Therefore, this finding highlighted that perceptions of a formal conversation with a superior could not be identified by communication channel alone. The reason channels were not associated with formality was because it was possible for all channels except three (Grievance Procedure, Video-Conference DMM and Talk-through radio) to be considered both formal and informal in different situations.

Three characteristics, record, content and audience, were identified that participants used to decide if a particular situation was formal at that time. The voice and silence literature has recently turned its attention to the role of formality, suggesting that formal communication channels are perceived as legitimate and therefore more likely to encourage voice (Klaas et al., 2012; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). However, where not everyone had the same view of formality, there is the possibility that some channels will not be viewed as formal and therefore, this argument may not be sound. It is therefore important for future research studies to capture definitions of formal and informal communication using the participant sample. Furthermore, it throws into question previous literature that has claimed that formality is important when using examples of formal and informal communication channels as a basis for their argument, without attempting to establish if they are recognised as formal or informal by participants.

C2) Formal communication represented risk when considering upward challenge

The method of communication that subordinates use to interact with their superior has not been considered as an influence over propensity to voice. However, the present study has shown that formal communication can be considered more risky than informal communication because of its association with organisational recording, its ability to therefore be shared and used in evidence, highlighting the high level of scrutiny under which police officers in the UK work.

The type of organisation in which participants work might be responsible for creating perceptions of risk. For example, formal communication is likely to shape voice because its recorded nature creates perceived risk owing to its ability to be shared with a larger audience (Kowtha et al., 2001), but the need for formal communication is important for public sector organisations because it allows them to provide an audit trail to show how decisions are being made (Brown et al., 2009). On the other hand, the recorded nature of formal communication could be perceived by subordinates to be advantageous where superiors are unlikely to act on voice where they have the opportunity to deny knowledge or dispute what was said (Krefting & Powers, 1998). The UKPS is a public sector organisation and one which is under constant scrutiny from the public, indicating that formal communication might make its way into the public domain.

C3) More senior officers viewed more of the communication channels as formal

When asked to categorise communication channels as formal or informal, as officers became more senior, they viewed more communication channels as formal. The voice and silence literature has focused mainly on the difference in voice behaviour between subordinates and superiors, rather than the differences between incremental levels of hierarchy. For example, a number of studies that have focused on voice, or

upward challenge in particular, have not examined the effect of organisational level on the outcome (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Kassing, 2000; Liu, Tangirala, & Ramanujam, 2013; Van Dyne et al., 2008)

Jablin (1982) found that subordinates at the top levels of organisations experienced more openness with their superiors than those at the lower levels of the organisation. Given the recent evidence to show that LMX and relationship quality does shape voice, it is now important to consider that not all subordinate-superior relationships are of the same quality and this might differ according to organisational level.

The present study showed that one reason for the difference in perceptions of formality of communication channel could be related to a greater felt responsibility owing to an increasing commitment to the police service and to a growing realisation of the importance of being a senior police officer. By viewing the concept of upward challenge through the lens of formality, it has been possible to identify the importance of public scrutiny for shaping upward challenge. On the one hand, public scrutiny required participants to behave according to expectations from the public and from their senior officers, but on the other hand, required them to be highly aware of what they were saying and doing in a public forum. This effect was likely to become magnified as the officers became more senior, possibly accounting for the increased perceptions of formality. The implications of greater formality at more senior levels might lead to a greater number of private conversations, making upward challenge less transparent.

UC1) Challenge was unlikely to take place using formal communication channels

The participants who were able to share their experiences of challenging a superior described how they preferred to do this in private. Using the three characteristics that denoted risk, speaking to a superior in private reduced the risk by limiting the audience to

one person and there was no record of the exchange meaning that it was unlikely to be shared with others. However, the participants recognised that challenging a superior was always risky and so challenging in private appeared to be the optimum way of reducing risk.

Not all officers had the opportunity to challenge their superiors in private, because they did not have a relationship that allowed them to speak outside of the formal channels. Although the participants did see their superior at regular intervals, even though those intervals may have been up to ten days apart, speaking to them outside of routine encounters might have seemed strange. For example, one Chief Inspector stated that where his officers wanted to see him in person, it would suggest a formal situation because the occurrence was so rare, suggesting that officers who have little interaction with their superior outside of formally scheduled interactions might feel greater levels of formality than others who have a more frequent level of interaction even during a private situation. In these cases, upward challenge is likely to feel more effortful.

The amount of perceived effort has been identified as a consideration in an individual's propensity to challenge upwards. For example, an appraisal of the costs versus the benefits has recently been identified as the main influencing factor in whether an individual is likely to challenge upwards or not (Zhan & Hample, 2016). The present study identified that where formal channels were primarily used by subordinates to speak to their superiors, the amount of perceived effort could be increased as officers would need to go out of their way to create a situation where they could speak to their superior without creating a record of the exchange or without an audience. Given the different forms of distance which meant that officers might need to attend to situations in their days off, or travel to meet a superior, depending on the nature of the challenge, it might lead to a situation where the costs outweighed the benefits. Therefore, challenge might be less

likely to take place. This might be particularly the case for Inspectors and Chief Inspectors given that distance was likely to have the greatest influence at these levels. The impact of this could be that upward challenge was not generated from this level, or that any upward challenge that came from the levels below, might stop at this level. Therefore, this could explain why information does not always reach superiors in organisations.

The findings confirmed that upward challenge was most likely to take place where officers had a good relationship with their superior and opportunities to interact frequently using a range of channels. An opportunity to challenge in private would be most likely to encourage challenge. A reduced level of interaction between officers and their superiors was found to be the result of distance which was promoted by organisation design features such as geographical distribution of officers, shift working, clear demarcation between tactical and strategic focus of officers and the extent to which officers and their superiors worked on shared operational tasks. Distance was the greatest between the levels of Inspector and Chief Inspector which is where challenge might be experienced as more difficult by officers.

The present study identified that upward challenge was likely to take place in private. The upward dissent literature, as well as the voice and silence literature has predominantly focused on face to face interactions between subordinates and their superiors without any attention being paid to the public or private nature in which this takes place. Therefore, an important contribution to the literature could be the formality of the setting in which upward challenge takes place. Kassing and Avtgis (1999) argued that superiors who exercised good upward influence could act as role models for other subordinates to encourage them to dissent. However, if challenge takes place in private, and as a number of participants explained, upward challenge should never be discussed with those below, this will prevent

superiors from becoming good role models. Social learning theory describes how individual behaviour can be influenced. One method is through observation and the presence of role models that can demonstrate behaviours and how they can be carried out successfully (Bandura, 1977). It is possible to link social learning theory to upward challenge, and suggest that challenging in private is unlikely to encourage upward challenge within the UKPS because of the absence of visible role models within the organisation. This is likely to allow the IVTs to persist because of the lack of counter evidence which was shown to be a main factor in their persistence.

Overall, the findings suggested that perceived formality was likely to shape upward challenge through a combination of factors such as relationship quality, power differentials and the availability of communication channels, meaning that upward challenge could be considered situational, risky and effortful. Although the way in which these factors influenced propensity to upward challenge were not measured, meaning that it is not possible to say how these factors influenced propensity to challenge, it appeared that five strategies were used to overcome the perceived risk of upward challenge. An opportunity to challenge in private appeared to be one of the most safe ways to challenge. A reduced level of interaction between officers and their superiors was promoted by organisation design features such as geographical distribution of officers, shift working, clear demarcation between tactical and strategic focus of officers and the extent to which officers and their superiors worked on shared operational tasks was found result in distance. Distance was the greatest between the levels of Inspector and Chief Inspector which is where challenge might be experienced as more difficult by officers.

8.2 Practical contributions

There are a number of practical implications of this research for the UK Police Service (UKPS) which are presented in Table 16.

Table 16. *Summary of practical contributions of this study*

| | | Practical Contributions |
|----------------------|----|--|
| Relationship | R2 | Officers and their superiors should work together on operational tasks if organisations wish to encourage upward challenge |
| Communication | C4 | Superiors should view upward challenge through a risk lens to understand what might prevent subordinates from speaking up |

R2) Officers and their superiors should work together on operational tasks if organisations wish to encourage upward challenge

Task and strategic distance represented aspects of organisational design which highlighted that officers and their superiors were not working on tasks together and therefore they had very little reason to interact. Without a reason to interact, officers and their superiors were more likely to become more distant from each other. Therefore, the UKPS could take into account the need to create opportunities for Inspectors and Chief Inspectors to interact more frequently. Where distance was greatest, formal communication channels were found to be the main way of interacting. However, participants described preferring to challenge in private so upward challenge might have been less likely to happen where officers and their superiors did not have opportunities for private interaction. One of the ways in which distance could be reduced is to encourage much greater and more regular contact between superiors and subordinates (Tourish & Hargie, 2004). Such approaches are likely to overcome some of the status differentials which inhibit upward challenge.

From a structured perspective, working groups could be established which increase the need for officers to work together, in particular from different parts of the UKPS, particularly where interaction would be otherwise limited. Given the 35-year length of service for which most officers sign up, it is worth the UKPS investing in building relationships with officers who are likely to work together, and not necessarily wait until superiors and their subordinates start working together before helping them to build relationships. One example, the vehicle user group, was an example of such an initiative. Officers were assigned to provide their views to a regular vehicle user group which comprised all officers using operational police cars, unmarked or marked. This brought together a range of officers of different ranks and from parts of the business to share their views. Other officers described being part of a public order policing group which enabled them to work with other officers outside of their district.

C4) Superiors should view upward communication through a risk lens to understand what might prevent subordinates from speaking up

Given that subordinates appear to make decisions based on channel characteristics which signify risk, superiors could attempt to understand which channels present the most and least risk in order to encourage subordinates to pass them particular types of information. For example, superiors can understand that subordinates are reluctant to speak up using channels for which there will be a record; superiors must take into account that subordinates are unlikely to speak up where there is an audience including people that they have never met or know very little; different contents are associated with different levels of risk e.g. offering suggestions is less risky than upward challenge. This means that superiors should think about the types of information that they want to hear about, and create channels which subordinates will feel comfortable to use. It is therefore possible to conclude that the perceived risk represented by the formal communication

channels determines the extent to which formal communication channels are used to voice. Morrison and Milliken (2000) and Klaas and colleagues (2012) argued that superiors may actively discourage upward communication by omitting to provide channels to encourage types of voice which they view as threatening to their reputation. Upward challenge is one of the most risky forms of voice because it carries with it a high risk of face threat to the superior and to the subordinate. Nevertheless, there were some superiors who were willing to invite challenge as they viewed it as beneficial and for these types of superiors, an awareness of how to encourage challenge would be beneficial.

Much of the voice and silence literature has made suggestions that superiors should be trained to accept challenge and negative feedback. Although this might be useful, organisations need to recognise and accept that not every superior will encourage upward challenge, nor will every subordinate want to give it. Therefore, it might be useful for organisations to adopt a more strategic view of upward challenge, and carry out a risk assessment to identify parts of the business where challenge will yield the greatest value. Individuals receptive to the benefits of upward challenge can then be assigned situations where their skills and proclivities will be valued. In the UKPS, upward challenge is likely to be particularly welcome in situations where challenging of assumptions can uncover missed leads or areas where more evidence is required. For example, murder investigations.

Given that participants indicated a preference for challenging upwards in private, where communication was predominantly restricted to communication situations which were recorded or where there was an audience, it is possible that formal situations would yield less challenge overall. Given the strong reliance on formal communication channels between Inspectors and Chief Inspectors, it could be concluded that challenge, if offered from the lower levels, could be stopped or be significantly reduced at Inspector level. There are a

number of options available to address this problem. Firstly, organisations could encourage superiors to invite officers to challenge, making it easier for officers to initiate challenge with their superior. Secondly, superiors could identify situations which could be strengthened by asking officers with expertise to contribute towards those decisions, creating the opportunity for interaction. For example, the findings showed that officers felt more powerful when they were considered an expert or asked for their expertise. Therefore, it may be important for superiors to involve subordinates in decision-making which may also have the added benefit of reducing the need for upward challenge because officers will not be hearing about decisions of which they were unaware.

Whether a lack of challenge through formal channels is considered problematic depends on whose perspective is prioritised. For example, superiors could use the risks presented by formal voice situations for their own advantage to discourage upward challenge. For example, by tabling decisions in meetings or using communication methods which are perceived of as formal, it is unlikely that officers will offer any challenge or negative feedback, thereby allowing the superior to move forward with their decision unhindered. Morrison and Milliken (2000) argued that superiors from a high power distance culture were unlikely to encourage feedback or invite opinions from others because they felt threatened or felt that those below them were unable to offer any useful insights. On the other hand, from an officer's perspective, formal communication can prevent upward challenge which could be problematic if the officer has real concerns which they felt unable to raise. Or, it is possible that the officer might use the risks associated with formal communication as an excuse to remain quiet, thereby preventing them from drawing attention to themselves.

In summary, the literature review identified that there are gaps in our understanding about how formal communication shapes upward challenge. Although there is much literature on the role of informal communication and its benefits for encouraging voice, this thesis has

added to the existing knowledge of voice and silence by demonstrating that formal communication can be viewed as risky and is therefore likely to result in the use of upward challenge strategies.

8.3 Strengths of the Present Study

The present study used participants from one force within the UKPS. However, the UKPS is a large organisation comprising 45 forces and over 150,000 officers across the UK. Most studies into voice and silence have used participants from a range of organisations to demonstrate generalisability of the findings. However, studies using only participants from one organisation enables the identification of cultural considerations which might have been missed in a wider sample because they were not common across all participants (Yin, 2009). The theme of promotion was one cultural aspect identified during the present study that may not have been identified if the results had been combined with those of other organisations as it may not have been a major theme running through other organisations. The focus on generalisability could explain the lack of studies exploring organisational characteristics. Given the size of the UKPS and the similar organisational design that spans all forces, it is considered likely that theoretical and practical implications will be applicable to most other forces.

This study identified hierarchical differences between different levels of the organisation when considering upward challenge. Previous studies have tended to treat all levels of management as homogenous, in part owing to statistical results which demonstrated no significant differences in voice behaviour at different levels of management (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011). However, the current study has shown that different levels of subordinate are likely to behave differently when their level of seniority is accompanied by different organisational arrangements to those below

or above. This would suggest that organisational design should be considered in future research.

The present study considered both verbal and written forms of communication and face to face and technological channels when defining formal communication and understanding how perceptions of formal communication shaped upward challenge. Most research into voice and silence has considered only verbal face to face interactions (see Pinder & Harlos, 2001 for the exception). However, upward challenge can and does take place using both verbal and written means and this might be particularly the case in organisations where teams work remotely and shift-working is prevalent. Although it was found that upward challenge was preferred to be done face to face in the present study, challenge via email did take place. Therefore, it is unrealistic for scholars to focus mainly on verbal face to face encounters in modern organisations.

8.4 Limitations of this Research

The conclusions drawn in this research have been subject to the limitations of the method used. Qualitative definitions of formal relationship with superior were gathered in order to understand the factors that shaped upward challenge from a subordinate perspective. The findings have been interpreted using Power Distance and LMX theories because these theories are the most appropriate for understanding how a formal relationship with superior shaped upward challenge in relation to the voice and silence literature. However, power distance and LMX scales were not used so it is not possible to draw exact comparisons between studies that used scales and this one.

Secondly, the police force used in the present study has been the subject of intense and prolonged public scrutiny over the past five to ten years, and as a result, it is therefore

possible that the participants had a heightened sense of risk associated with formal communication which may not be present in other forces.

Third, the relationship between Sergeants and Inspectors was not explored in the present study. By including them in the present study, important insight could have been provided to understand how they manage a more proximal relationship than that of the Inspectors-Chief Inspectors, but a less distant one than the Constables-Sergeants. For example, the Sergeants and Inspectors were more likely to work the same shift patterns and although Inspectors were not based at the same station as the Sergeants all of the time, the Inspectors described working from each station at least once per shift.

Finally, when asking participants to describe the relationship they had with their superior, only one of the participants described a poor relationship with their superior. Therefore, it is probable that this study has not captured views on how a poor relationship with superior shaped upward challenge. Instead, it has possibly identified that those with a good relationship with superior used upward challenge strategies rather than remaining silent.

8.5 Suggestions for Further Research

The voice literature needs to pay more attention to organisational context. Despite numerous scholars arguing that organisational characteristics do influence upward communication and collective levels of voice and silence (Glauser, 1984; Jablin, 1982; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), there has been very little empirical exploration of this area. Morrison and Milliken (2000) highlighted that tall hierarchical organisations, mature industries and organisations with high levels of centralised decision-making would be most likely to have superiors who were unwilling to listen to views from those below them. This would suggest that subordinates working for smaller organisations, those with

flatter structures or decentralised decision-making might perceive formality in different ways, or may not feel that formality is risky.

Further research might also explore how Power Distance can be reduced in tall hierarchical organisations. For example, if it is possible to develop a high relationship quality in a command and control culture that does not resort to supervision exchanges, resulting in superiors being able to encourage upward challenge knowing that they are able to act on subordinate views if necessary. Furthermore, although it is theorised that where the superior has developed a leadership exchange with their subordinate, it is difficult for the superior to resort to a supervision exchange without damaging the relationship (Yukl, 2010), in the present study, it was not clear if this was the case.

It is possible that the present study has highlighted that the quantitative measure of LMX might not be sufficient to understand nuances in organisational culture which shape the relationships that subordinates have with their superiors and the subsequent impact on voice. Therefore, further research is required to develop qualitative measures of relationship quality and power distance.

It was found that participants were likely to perceive formality according to the situation in which they found themselves, rather than consider formality to be a permanent feature. For example, when defining formal relationship with superior, formal voice situations were those where officers felt it unlikely that their views would be considered, or where there was a likelihood that their superior would use the officers' attempt at upward challenge to negatively influence their career development. In a similar way, they were likely to consider formal voice situations as situations where the characteristics of record, content and audience indicated formality, rather than consider communication channels to be always formal. Further research is therefore needed to understand if the

concept of formal situations is likely to exist in other organisational contexts. For example, the participating police force identified the recording of conversations as risky, but this is unlikely to be considered as important in organisations where the likelihood of others obtaining the record and using it negatively is lesser.

When considering how distance can be reduced between subordinates and superiors who don't get much opportunity to interact, the socio-technical design of police stations is likely to be important in encouraging more frequent encounters. However, there are some challenges to increasing interaction in public spaces in the UKPS. For example, the canteen used to be the centre of a police officer's daily routine (Kiely & Peek, 2002). However, budget cuts have seen police canteens closed or become less appealing, with police officers now choosing to take break times away from the police station, preventing them from interacting with each other. Furthermore, despite the fact that open-plan offices are now becoming more usual in police stations, where superiors sit alongside their subordinates, the reluctance to speak about work-related matters in public is limiting the type of conversations that officers are having with each other. Therefore, more research is required to understand how random interactions can be introduced in places where public conversations about work are risky.

8.6 Concluding Remarks

This study had one main research question which was to understand how perceived formality shaped upward challenge. Two areas of formality were identified as likely to be perceived of as formal and therefore be important for shaping upward challenge; relationship with superior and communication. The present study found that perceptions of formal relationships with superior and formal communication were linked to four forms of distance which were created by the organisation design of the UKPS. Where distance reduced the ability for subordinates and superiors to speak informally, it is likely that upward challenge

requires more effort because of the reduced opportunity for informal communication channels to be established.

This thesis aimed to incorporate literature from the voice and silence and communication literatures in order to provide insight into how perceptions of formality shaped upward challenge. The role of formal communication was found to be important because of the different views that all participants had of formal channels of communication. This could therefore lead to misunderstandings about how information was being shared between officers and superiors, potentially discouraging upward challenge. Where formal channels are the only option available, subordinates are more likely to be guarded when passing information and some individuals may prefer not to pass the information at all. This was owing to the risk associated with formal communication channels.

In conclusion, the findings from the present study demonstrated that perceived formality appeared to shape upward challenge by encouraging the use of upward challenge strategies. Through the exploration of definitions for formal relationship with superior and formal communication, the present study identified that perceived formality could be better understood as formal voice situations, rather than solely determined by relationship with superior or communication channels. Formal voice situations were considered risky and the use of upward challenge strategies was designed to minimise the risk associated with upward challenge to a superior. The organisation design of the UKPS was identified as a potential influence over perceptions of formality and the effect of perceived formality on upward challenge. Furthermore, one aspect of organisational culture, promotion, was identified as a main driver of upward challenge behaviour.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Original card sort

| Formal | Informal | Inbetween | Not relevant |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Scheduled meetings group | Personal mobile text message | Telephone call | |
| Grievance procedure | FB Group message | Coming unannounced to your office | |
| VC | FB Wall post | Mobile work phone call | |
| Morning Briefing | Twitter post | Bumping into you | |
| Scheduled meetings 1-2-1 | FB personal message | | |
| Suggestion box | Mobile phone call personal | | |
| Email | | | |
| Appraisal Review | | | |
| Point to point | | | |
| Talk through | | | |
| Work mobile text | | | |
| | | | |

NB. The changed cards are in **bold**

Amended card sort

| Formal | Informal | Inbetween | Not relevant |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------|--------------|
| Mobile work phone call | Personal mobile text message | | |
| Scheduled meetings group | FB Group message | | |
| Grievance procedure | FB Wall post | | |
| VC | Twitter post | | |
| Morning Briefing | FB personal message | | |
| Scheduled meetings 1-2-1 | Bumping into you | | |
| Suggestion box | Mobile phone call personal | | |
| Email | Coming unannounced to your office | | |
| Appraisal Review | Telephone call | | |
| Point to point | | | |
| Talk through | | | |
| Work mobile text | | | |

NB. The changed cards are in **bold**

Appendix 2

Example Information Sheet for pilot study

Research Project Title:

The role of the informal organisation in enhancing upward flow of operational performance information between non-superiors and superiors

2. Invitation paragraph

You are invited to take part in a pilot study which will inform the design of a wider research project. Before you decide whether you want to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

The aim of this project is to serve as a pilot study in order to scope studies and appropriate timings for a wider research project. This pilot study forms part of a PhD programme currently being undertaken by the researcher.

Information sharing has been shown to be a key factor determining competitive advantage within organisations. Organisational structure is an important factor in determining information processing capacity by shaping the way in which superiors and non-superiors communicate and share information with each other. It has been found that because problems within an organisation are not conveyed to management in a timely fashion, or at all, conditions continue within an organisation which are damaging or prevent growth of the organisation, underlining the importance of upward communication.

The objective of the PhD is to investigate under what circumstances superiors and non-superiors use informal communication networks to circulate operational performance information. Operational performance information is any information which requires management attention in order to improve overall performance. For example, a customer complaint indicating a design fault in a product. For non-superiors, this will constitute passing information upwards within the organisation. For superiors, this will constitute how they find out about information from their direct reports. In this research project, a non-superior is a direct report of the superior but has no direct reports of their own.

For this project, a study will be carried out which explore superiors' and non-superiors' perceptions of the differences between formal and informal communication channels and how and when they are used for circulation of operational performance information.

4. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this pilot study because your Head of Service has agreed to support this research project.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. However, you can withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to attend an interview which will last approximately two hours. During the interview, you will be asked to undertake a number of activities. Firstly, you will be provided with a number of cards, each containing a form of communication. You will be asked to sort the cards according to how you seek operational performance information relating to your team performance both formally and informally. There will also be the opportunity to add additional methods of communication where appropriate. You will be asked to talk about your thoughts whilst you carry out this exercise. You will then be asked a number of questions about your choices on the card sort activity in order to understand the reasons for seeking information through these channels. This will take the form of a semi-structured interview where there will be a number of pre-determined questions but additional questions will be asked where appropriate. Finally, you will be asked to identify characteristics that describe channels that you find useful when seeking operational performance information from your direct reports. This will produce a grid which contains your views on important factors that shape the way in which you seek operational performance information whilst at work. At the end of the interview, you will be given a short debrief and you will have the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and the study in which you have just taken part.

This research will take place at your location of work during the course of your usual working day.

7. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Yes. The study will be recorded using an audio recording device. The audio recording of your activities made during this research will be used only for data analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no-one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. All aspects of the Data Protection Act (1998) will be followed. All data gathered will be treated as confidential and stored in a password-protected file on the shared drive of the University network. If paper copies are kept, they will be stored under lock and key in my University office. When the data is analysed and written up in its final format, anonymity will be guaranteed for all participants. Whilst coding and transcribing the data, pseudonyms will be used to prevent even primary data being understandable by anyone else. Data will be purged immediately on completion of the PhD or where you have requested to withdraw from the research.

8. What do I have to do?

To take part in this study, you need to be a superior with at least one direct report who is also willing to take part in the study. Interviews with direct reports will be conducted separately.

9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate disadvantages or risks associated with participating in the research project, it is possible that through this work, you may become aware of situations where organisational communication has prevented optimal performance in the past.

10. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits associated with participating in the research project, it is envisaged that this work will help you understand the complexities of organisational communication and the role of the formal and informal organisation in this process.

11. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case, an explanation will be given to you.

12. What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint, this should be done in the first instance to the research ethics co-ordinator for this research project. They can be contacted on email at mgt.research@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by the research ethics co-ordinator, you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary on email at registrar@sheffield.ac.uk.

13. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Yes. All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any subsequent reports or publications.

14. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

You will be asked to provide your status as superior. In addition, biographical data in the form of age, sex, tenure and department will be collected for post-hoc analysis purposes. Data will be collected from both superiors and non-superiors in order to explore any potential differences this may cause in the way operational performance information circulates within the workplace.

15. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will be used to shape the wider research programme as part of a PhD which is due for completion in September 2015. In any publications, conference proceedings or presentations where data is used, your identity will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained of all participants.

16. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being conducted through the University of Sheffield and is part-funded by the Economic Social and Research Council (ESRC), the Society for Advancement of Management Studies (SAMS) and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

17. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the ethics review procedure at the Institute of Work Psychology which forms part of the University of Sheffield Management School. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

18. Contact for further information

Lead researcher

Name: Sarah Brooks
Email: s.brooks@sheffield.ac.uk
Contact number: 07920 815981

Supervisor

Name: Professor Penelope Dick
Email: P.Dick@sheffield.ac.uk
Contact number: 0114 222 3365

Informed Consent

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I request to withdraw from the research project, all of my data will be purged immediately.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give my consent for the interview to be audio recorded for data analysis purposes. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no-one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant name (please print)

Participant signature

Researcher name (please print)

Researcher signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of your participation in this study, this should be done in the first instance to the research ethics co-ordinator for this research project. They can be contacted on email at mgt.research@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by the research ethics co-ordinator, you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary on email at registrar@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 3

Example Information Sheet for stages one and two

Research Project Title:

The role of the informal organisation in enhancing upward flow of operational performance information between non-superiors and superiors

2. Invitation paragraph

You are invited to take part in a study which will form part of a wider research project. Before you decide whether you want to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

Information sharing has been shown to be a key factor affecting operational performance. Organisational structure is an important factor in determining information processing capacity by shaping the way in which superiors and non-superiors communicate and share information with each other. It has been found that because problems within an organisation are not conveyed to management in a timely fashion, or at all, conditions continue within an organisation which are damaging or prevent growth of the organisation, underlining the importance of upward communication.

The objective of the PhD is to investigate under what circumstances superiors and non-superiors use formal and informal communication to circulate operational performance information. Operational performance information is any information which requires management attention in order to improve overall performance. For example, a complaint from a member of the public. For non-superiors, this will constitute passing information upwards within the organisation. For superiors, this will constitute how they find out about information from their direct reports. In this research project, a non-superior is a direct report of the superior but has no direct reports of their own.

For this project, a study will be carried out which explore sergeants' and constables' perceptions of the differences between formal and informal communication and how and when they are used for circulation of operational performance information.

4. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study because your Chief Superintendent has agreed to support this research project.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. However, you can withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to attend an interview which will last approximately two hours. During the interview, you will be asked to undertake a number of activities. Firstly, you will be provided with a number of cards, each containing a form of communication. You will be asked to sort the cards according to how you pass information upwards to management both formally and informally. There will also be the opportunity to add additional methods of communication where appropriate. You will be asked to talk about your thoughts whilst you carry out this exercise. You will then be asked a number of questions about your choices on the card sort activity in order to understand the reasons for passing information through these channels. This will take the form of a semi-structured interview where there will be a number of pre-determined questions but additional questions will be asked where appropriate. Finally, you will be asked to identify characteristics that describe channels which encourage you to pass information to management. This will produce an output which contains your views on important factors that shape the way in which you pass operational performance information to management. At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity for a short debrief and there will be time to ask any questions about the research project and the study in which you have just taken part.

This research will take place at your location of work during the course of your usual working day.

7. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Yes. This study will be recorded using an audio recording device. The audio recording of your activities made during this research will be used only for data analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no-one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. All aspects of the Data Protection Act (1998) will be followed. All data gathered will be treated as confidential and stored in a password-protected file on the shared drive of the University network. If paper copies are kept, they will be stored under lock and key in my University office. When the data is analysed and written up in its final format, anonymity will be guaranteed for all participants. Whilst coding and transcribing the data, pseudonyms will be used to prevent even primary data being understandable by anyone else. Data will be purged immediately where you have requested to withdraw from the research.

8. What do I have to do?

To take part in this study, you need to be a police constable who does not have any direct reports and you need to have a sergeant who is also willing to take part in this study.

9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate disadvantages or risks associated with participating in the research project, it is possible that through this work, you may become aware of situations where organisational communication has prevented optimal performance.

10. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits associated with participating in the research project, it is envisaged that this work will help you understand the complexities of organisational communication and the role of the formal and informal organisation in this process.

11. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case, an explanation will be given to you.

12. What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint, this should be done in the first instance to the research ethics co-ordinator for this research project. They can be contacted on email at mgt.research@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by the research ethics co-ordinator, you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary on email at registrar@sheffield.ac.uk.

13. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Yes. All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any subsequent reports or publications.

14. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

You will be asked to provide your status as non-superior. In addition, biographical data in the form of age, sex, tenure and department will be collected for post-hoc analysis purposes. Data will be collected from both superiors and non-superiors in order to explore any potential differences this may cause in the way operational performance information circulates within the workplace.

15. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will be used to shape the wider research programme as part of a PhD which is due for completion in September 2015. In any publications, conference proceedings or presentations where data is used, your identity will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained of all participants.

16. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being conducted through the University of Sheffield and is part-funded by the Economic Social and Research Council (ESRC), the Society for Advancement of Management Studies (SAMS) and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

17. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the ethics review procedure at the Institute of Work Psychology which forms part of the University of Sheffield Management School. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

18. Contact for further information

Lead researcher

Name: Sarah Brooks
Email: s.brooks@sheffield.ac.uk
Contact number: 0114 222 3218

Supervisor

Name: Professor Penelope Dick
Email: P.Dick@sheffield.ac.uk
Contact number: 0114 222 3365

Informed Consent

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I request to withdraw from the research project, all of my data will be purged immediately.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give my consent for the interview to be audio recorded for data analysis purposes. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no-one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recordings.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant name (please print)

Participant signature

Researcher name (please print)

Researcher signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about any aspect of your participation in this study, this should be done in the first instance to the research ethics co-ordinator for this research project. They can be contacted on email at mgt.research@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by the research ethics co-ordinator, you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary on email at registrar@sheffield.ac.uk.

Appendix 4

Interview Schedule – Police Constables – Main Pilot Data (stage one)

Introduction

Thanks very much for taking the time to meet with me today. I am a 3rd year doctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield in the Institute of Work Psychology. My area of research is about how subordinates find ways to pass bad news to their superiors.

The purpose of the interview today is so that I can talk to you about the ways in which you pass bad news to your superior. Just so I can be clear specifically about what I'm asking you for, I'm going to clarify a few terms. Please ask any questions if you have any.

Firstly, when I talk about your superior, I am referring to the most immediately hierarchical superior that you have.

Secondly, I am specifically referring to upward communication to your superior and not downward communication from them to you.

Thirdly, when I talk about bad news, we will spend some time later on exploring what that phrase means to you.

Introduction

1. Can you describe to me how you usually pass work-related information to your Sergeant?
2. Thinking in particular of the one who will be taking part in this research, how would you normally pass bad news to them?

Bad News

3. How would you describe bad news in the work sense?
4. What types of things do you consider when you are passing this to your Sergeant?
5. How do you think your Sergeant encourages you to pass this to them?

Reducing uncertainty

6. Do you get a sense that you understand what type of information your Sergeant needs?
7. How they tried to help you understand this?
8. Can you give me an example of when you have found it difficult to pass bad news to your sergeant?

Formal Role Behaviour

9. How do you feel about passing bad news? Do you see it as your role?
10. Do you think that your Sergeant sees it as their role to deal with the bad news?
11. If I were to say to you that some scholars see speaking to your superior about bad news as an extra-role behaviour, what would you say?

Formal organisational characteristics

1. Are you aware of any organisational influences that shape your communication behaviour in passing bad news?

Formal Communication

Card sort

Formal Communication characteristics

Card Sort – high level differences between formal and informal

Re-card sort – mental model of how communication works

Situational Test

1. Bad news versus good news vs routine news

Using the results from the card sort, can you explain to me what the differences would be in you passing bad news, good news or routine news.

Interview Schedule – Police Sergeants – Main Pilot Data (stage one)

Introduction

Thanks very much for taking the time to meet with me today. I am a 3rd year doctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield in the Institute of Work Psychology. My area of research is about how subordinates find ways to pass bad news to their superiors.

The purpose of the interview today is so that I can talk to you about the ways in which your direct reports pass bad news to you. Just so I can be clear specifically about what I'm asking you for, I'm going to clarify a few terms. Please ask any questions if you have any.

Firstly, when I talk about your direct reports, I am referring to those who do not have any direct reports at all.

Secondly, I am specifically referring to upward communication and not communication downward from you to your team.

Thirdly, when I talk about bad news, we will spend some time later on exploring that that phrase means to you.

Introduction

1. Can you describe to me how you usually hear about work-related information from your constables?
2. Thinking in particular of the one who will be taking part in this research, how would you normally hear from them?

Bad News

3. How would you describe bad news in the work sense?
4. How would you like to hear about it?
5. How do you think you encourage your constables to pass this to you?

Reducing uncertainty

6. Do you get a sense that the constable understands what type of information you need?
7. How have you tried to help them understand this?
8. Do you get this information in a timely manner?
9. Have there been occasions where you haven't heard information or you've heard it later than you would have liked?

Formal Role Behaviour

10. How do you feel about dealing with bad news? Do you see it as your role?
11. Do you think that your constables see it as their role to pass you bad news?
12. If I were to say to you that some scholars see speaking to your superior about bad news as an extra-role behaviour, what would you say?

Formal organisational characteristics

13. Are you aware of any organisational influences that shape your communication behaviour in finding out bad news?

Formal Communication

Card sort

Formal Communication characteristics

Card Sort – high level differences between formal and informal

Re-card sort – mental model of how communication works

Situational Test

2. Bad news versus good news vs routine news

Using the results from the card sort, can you explain to me what the differences would be in you trying to find out bad news, good news or routine news.

Appendix 5

Semi Structured Interview Inspector and Chief Inspector

Introduction

Thanks very much for taking the time to meet with me today. I am a 3rd year doctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield in the Institute of Work Psychology. My area of research is about how subordinates pass information to their superiors that maybe perceived as critical of either them, or the organisation.

The purpose of the interview today is so that I can talk to you about the ways in which you pass this information to your superior. Just so I can be clear specifically about what I'm asking you for, I'm going to clarify a few terms. Please ask any questions if you have any.

Firstly, when I talk about your superior, I am referring to the most immediately hierarchical superior that you have. When I talk about direct reports, I am talking specifically about the people in the hierarchical lower level.

Secondly, I will be referring to upward communication to your superior and upward communication from your direct reports. I will not refer to downward communication from them to you.

Communication

Superior

1. Can you tell me how you normally communicate with your superior?
2. What opportunities are there for you to communicate to your superior?

Direct Reports

1. What opportunities are there for your direct reports to communicate to you?
2. Do you feel that you hear the types of information that you need to?

Relationships and Trust

A. Superior Relationship

1. How would you describe the relationship you have with your superior? Formal or informal? What does formal and informal mean in this situation? What makes you describe it as such?
2. How would you say that you communicate with them? Formally or informally? What makes you say that?
3. What about with your peer level colleagues?

Trust

1. Would you say that you trust your superior?
2. How does this shape the way that you communicate with them?
3. Can you give me an example of the trust that you have in your superior has how this has shaped the way you speak to them?
4. Do you think that your superior trusts you?
5. How does this shape the way that they communicate with you?
6. Example

B. Direct reports

Relationship

1. How would you describe the relationship you have with your direct reports? Formal or informal? What does formal and informal mean in this situation? What makes you describe it as such?
2. How would you say that you communicate with them? Formally or informally? What makes you say that (example)?

Trust

1. Would you say that you trust your direct reports?
2. How does this shape the way that you communicate with them?
3. Example
4. Do you think that your direct reports trust you?
5. How does this shape the way that they communicate with you?
6. Example

C. Peers

Relationship

1. How would you describe the relationship you have with your peer-level colleagues? Formal or informal? What does formal and informal mean in this situation? What makes you describe it as such?
2. How would you say that you communicate with them? Formally or informally? What makes you say that?
3. Example

Trust

1. Would you say that you trust your colleagues?
2. How does this shape the way that you communicate with them?
3. Example
4. Do you think that your colleagues trust you?
5. How does this shape the way that they communicate with you?
6. Example

Critical Upward Communication

To Superior

1. Have you ever disagreed with your superior about something they've asked you to do, or a policy decision, or a new rule that's been introduced, the way they are running an investigation for example?
2. Example. What did you do? How did you communicate this? What was the outcome?

Subordinate disagreed with you

1. Has a subordinate ever disagreed with something you have asked them to do, or a policy decision, or a new rule that's been introduced, the way you are running an investigation for example?
2. Example. How did they do this? How did they communicate this? What was the outcome? How did you feel? What did you think?

Power

Superior

1. Do you feel that your superior is more powerful than you? What effect does this have on your desire to pass information to them? Would you prefer to tell them different types of things?
2. Example

Direct Reports

1. Do you feel more powerful than your direct reports? How does this shape the way that you receive/seek information from them? What effect do you think this has on their desire to give you information? Do you find that you hear about some things more readily than others?
2. Example

Scenarios

Can you describe how you would communicate the following to your superior?

1. A colleague that you know is drinking on duty.
2. **In your opinion, your superior is handling an investigation wrongly.**
3. You have realised that you have made a mistake whilst processing a piece of evidence which you realise could have led to the false conviction of an offender.
4. **Your superior asks you to do something that you don't agree with/think is wrong/inappropriate – what do you do?**
5. Your superior asks you about a colleague, who also happens to be a close friend. They have been acting irrationally whilst out on duty which has attracted a number of complaints from members of the public. You know that their marriage is breaking down but your friend has asked you not to tell anyone about it.
6. You have an idea that you want to share with your superior about how to improve a process but you need their help to do it.

7. You have been invited to join a gambling den by members of your shift which takes place on days off.

Appendix 6

Case Study Protocol for researching the role of formality in shaping voice and silence.

A. An introduction to the case study and purpose of protocol

1. Case study questions, hypotheses and propositions

Case study question: how does perceived formality shape voice and silence? [by virtue of the question, this seeks to explore and explain]

Hypothesis 1: a formal relationship with manager is more likely to discourage direct voice than to encourage it.

Hypothesis 2: using formal communication channels to communicate directly with a manager is more likely to discourage direct voice than to encourage it.

Hypothesis 3: where voice is perceived to be an in-role behaviour, voice will be more likely.

Hypothesis 4: individuals will be less likely to challenge upwards where they have a formal relationship with their manager, and/or are using formal communication channels, but will be more likely to do this if they perceive the issue to be an in-role behaviour.

2. Theoretical framework for the case study (this should reflect the exploratory and explanatory nature of the research)

Hypothesis 1: based on the literature, it could be that a formal relationship with manager is more likely to discourage direct voice than to encourage it. This hypothesis is based on:

- a) People report withholding from their manager because they are scared of the repercussions and one of the reasons for this is that they have a poor or distant relationship with their manager (Milliken et al., 2003; Brinsfield, 2013)
- b) Organisations where there is a senior management team with a high power distance culture would be more likely to discourage voice (Morrison & Milliken, 2000)
- c) There is a positive link between high LMX and voice (Van Dyne & Botero, 2009)

Hypothesis 2: based on the literature, it could be that using formal communication channels are more likely to discourage direct voice than to encourage it. This hypothesis is based on:

- a) People prefer speaking to their manager informally e.g. M&S, 2013 – any others? [This would allow a discussion to sit better about the rival propositions]

Hypothesis 3: based on the literature, it could be that where voice is perceived to be an in-role behaviour, voice will be more likely. This hypothesis is based on:

- a) Where people perceive voice to be an IRB, they are more likely to do it (Tangirala...)
- b) Voice is currently perceived of an ERB but there have been suggestions that voice may be considered an IRB by some (Mowbray et al., 2014).

Hypothesis 4: based on the literature, individuals will be less likely to challenge upwards where they have a formal relationship with their manager, and/or are using formal communication channels, but will be more likely to do this if they perceive the issue to be an in-role behaviour. This hypothesis is based on:

- a) People are reluctant to challenge upwards (Tourish & Robson, 2003)
- b) Evidence from hypothesis 1 (Did M et al., Brinsfield, D&T, 2010 look at challenge?)
- c) Evidence from hypothesis 2 (How is challenge shaped by formality?)
- d) Evidence from hypothesis 3

3. Role of protocol in guiding the case study investigator (notes that the protocol is a standardized agenda for the investigator's line of inquiry)

- a. The purpose of the protocol is to:
 - i. ensure that the literature review leads neatly to findings and discussion.
 - ii. ensure that the data collection process does not stray from the original research question
 - iii. ensure that the data collection methods are suitable to answer the case study question
 - iv. To ensure that the outline of the case study report is fit for the audience and covers all relevant aspects of the case

B. Data Collection procedures

- a. Names of sites to be visited, including contact persons
 - i. **Stage 1.** Pilot study, 3 x Sergeants, 3 x Constables. Matched pair design. Aim: to ensure the methods and questions allow the researcher to answer the research questions
 - ii. **Stage 2.** To gather data to answer the research questions. 16 participants requested of Inspector and Chief Inspector ranks.
- b. Data collection plan (covers the type of evidence to be expected, including the roles of people to be interviewed, the events to be observed, and any other documents to be reviewed when on site)

Descriptive evidence

- i. SSI – **descriptive** evidence to explain how the officer normally speaks to their manager, and to their direct reports below if applicable;
- ii. Card sorts – **descriptive** evidence to show similarities and difference between categorisations of formal (and informal) communication
- iii. Comms interview – **descriptive** evidence of the corporate perspective of formal and informal communication

Exploratory evidence

- iv. TAPs – **explanatory** evidence for how officers define formal communication
- v. SSI – **exploratory** evidence to understand how officers understand the power differentials that exist between themselves and their manager and how this shapes the quality of their relationship

- vi. SSI – **exploratory** evidence to understand how officers consider the role of trust in describing the quality of relationship with their manager
 - vii. SSI – **exploratory** evidence to understand the factors that might shape voice behaviour
 - viii. Focus group – **explanatory** evidence for how officers understand the barriers to upward communication
 - c. Expected preparation prior to site visits (identifies specific information to be reviewed and issues to be covered, prior to going on site)
- C. Outline of the case study report
- a. Many scandals in policing recently (introduction to the compelling reason that this research is needed)
 - b. Formality appears to shape upward challenge but it is not clear how or why. The police has many characteristics which could mean that formality is perceived often. (literature review exploring the importance of upward challenge for organisations and the fact that the voice and silence literature has strong evidence to suggest that formality can shape voice and silence). However, formality is socially constructed so it is important to define it before any conclusions can be drawn about its influence over voice and silence. [This exploratory study examined the relationship with manager, formal communication and in-role behaviour]
 - c. Methodology - The methods used were highly appropriate to capture socially constructed phenomena. Card sort was a systematic way to capture differences whilst allowing people the freedom to represent how they viewed communication. [what about the social construction of formal relationship with manager?]
 - d. Findings - Formality influences upward challenge in the UKPS in the following ways and the reasons for this.
 - e. Discussion - Despite the differences in perceptions of formality across the participants, it is possible that perceived formality does shape voice and silence by making people guarded when speaking using formal communication channels. With regards to relationship with manager, it was assumed that a formal relationship with manager would cause people to voice less often, but where challenge was considered to be an IRB, the formality of the relationship did not seem to matter to their propensity to voice. However, it was likely that formality of relationship resulted in higher levels of distortion. However, an assumption was made that a formal relationship would be a poor one. In that case, LMX maturation theory was used. However, it was not possible to associate a poor relationship with manager to a formal one as even officers who had a formal relationship with their manager described having the confidence to challenge if necessary (Check mI2 and mI6 mainly).
 - f. Reflexivity section on how my personal bias has shaped the study and the findings
 - g. Conclusion. Further exploration is required in order to understand what a formal relationship with manager looks like, and how it can be understood

how this shapes voice and silence behaviour as it does not negatively shape upward challenge, particularly where challenge is perceived to be an IRB.

- h. Appendices. Example of amended card sort tables, interview sheets for pilot and main studies, ethical consent form, chronology of events covering pilot, main study pilot and main study, dates, timings, main changes to research questions, data analysis tables, list of persons interviewed

D. Case Study questions (see figure 3.3 for a detailed question)

- a. How does formality shape upward challenge?
 - i. Describe why the UKPS seemed the best place for this case study, why you chose uniformed officers, why you chose the lowest four ranks
 - ii. How can you define perceived formality?
 - iii. What difference does perceived formality make to voice?
 - iv. Why does perceived formality make a difference to voice?

Figure 3.3 Illustrative protocol question

Define perceived formality.

- Ask people to explain what they mean when they said they have a formal/informal relationship with their manager. [actually, I think I might have evidence for the informal relationship question]
- Ask people what they meant by formal communication
- Ask people how they decided if something was in-role behaviour

How did perceived formality make a difference to voice and silence?

- Collect examples of the difference that a formal relationship meant to their propensity to voice [the reason I don't have this is actually because not many people had a formal relationship with their managers so this would have been hypothetical and I was trying to stay away from hypothetical answers]
- Collect examples of the difference that formal communication would have meant to their propensity to voice
- Collect examples of how perceptions of in-role behaviour made a difference to their voice behaviour.

Why does perceived formality make a difference to voice?

- What is underpinning their reasons for choosing voice or silence?
- Examples of reasons why formality makes a difference to challenge