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**Examining middle management perspectives on distributed  
leadership: a case study of an independent school.**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ***Declaration***

This thesis is the sole work of the author, and has not been submitted for a degree at any other University.

**Examining middle management perspectives on distributed leadership:  
a case study of an independent school.**

**Abstract**

This thesis aimed to identify how effectively distributed leadership can contribute to school improvement as related to and experienced by middle managers (heads of department) at x school.

The research drew upon both the theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to distributed leadership in order to provide the conceptual framework for the case study approach. A mixed methods approach was employed with data collected a focus group of five middle managers, 13 semi-structured interviews and 15 questionnaires.

The findings demonstrated that school improvement was seen as clearly taking place at x school through the leadership practised by middle managers. This in turn aided the school in building the internal capacity for future development. However, the extent to which the middle managers exhibited distributed leadership was questionable and varied from one department to another.

The school was seen as showing discrepancies between distributed leadership in theory and distributed leadership in practice and thus not benefiting from the advantages that distributed leadership theory suggests.

There was also a lack of understanding surrounding the concept of distributed leadership amongst the middle managers.

Recommendations are made which would enable distributed leadership to be developed at x school.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| MA   | Master of Arts                                   |
| NPQH | National Professional Qualification for Headship |
| PGCE | Post Graduate Certificate in Education           |
| ISI  | Independent Schools Inspectorate                 |
| ISC  | Independent Schools Council                      |
| LDD  | Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities        |
| BERA | British Educational Research Association         |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education       |

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

This research arose from my personal experience of leadership in a variety of schools and especially in my current post. I have been a head of department and a Housemaster of a Boarding School, and since 2002 have been a member of Leadership and Senior Management teams in three schools. I have always had an interest in leadership issues and school improvement and this led to my attaining an MA in Educational Management and the NPQH qualification. This was a good opportunity for me to further my career development as I was in a strong position to take on a leadership role having established links with the University of Warwick through my involvement with the PGCE and Teach First programmes. The area of distributed leadership was underdeveloped in the school about which I am reporting, and there is a lack of research into distributed leadership in the independent sector as a whole.

My research takes place in x school, an independent school in the West Midlands. X school was inspected in 2004 by ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate) who identified shortcomings with middle management at a number of levels. A subsequent ISI Inspection in May 2010 found considerable improvements in this area, but I wanted to investigate and research in more detail whether there was the capacity for further and sustained improvement and to ascertain if the school was building leadership capacity for the future through distributed leadership. This investigation necessarily included an examination of what leadership means in an

educational context, as well as the differences between Leadership and Management.

X school is an 11 to 18 HMC (Headmasters' Conference) English Independent co-educational day school. It is situated in the centre of a large city, and is one of four schools under a foundation with a single board of governors. It falls under the umbrella of the Independent Schools Council (ISC, 2010) which represents 1,260 Independent Schools educating more than 500,000 children in the UK, Ireland and overseas. It has on roll some 860 students and is selective.

X school was founded in 1545 by John Hales as a condition, set by King Henry VIII, to his purchase of former monastery land in the local city area. The first lessons were taught in the church of a local monastery. In 1558 x school moved to another property owned by John Hales, the Hospital of St John the Baptist, which is now known as "The Grammar School". It remained on this site for some 327 years. In 1885 x school moved to its current site. During the Second World War x school was evacuated to the countryside and many of the School buildings were destroyed by German air raids in 1940 and 1941. Girls were first admitted in 1975 and the School remains a co-educational establishment. Famous former pupils include R. E. S. Wyatt and Philip Larkin. As with any educational establishment, facilities have been developed and enhanced over the years; perhaps most notable of late have been a new sixth form centre, sports hall and swimming pool.

In terms of outcomes x school is a high achieving School. At A2 Level over a five-year period from 2006 to 2010 the percentage of entries at A\* to A grade ranged between 37 and 56%, while those at A\* to B grade ranged between 67 and 85%. At GCSE Level over the same period of time the percentage of entries at A\* to A grade ranged from 60 to 73%, with entries at A\* to B grade ranging from 82 to 92%. Leavers' destinations at Year 13 include high-ranking universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick, UCL, York, Durham, Bristol and Nottingham. The types of courses followed include Medicine, Engineering (various forms), Law, Mathematics, Economics, Philosophy, Music, Physics and Chemistry to name a few examples.

There were three main reasons for choosing this school as the setting for this research. The first is the matter of convenience. Because I work full time, there is a significant limit on my time. Since I was a member of the senior management team I was able to gain access to experiences of Leadership relatively easily. The second reason is that there is a lack of research into distributed leadership in the Independent sector. The third reason is that the school being researched is not an untypical instance of an independent secondary school in the UK. Below is a table comparing this case study with the average independent secondary school in the ISC:

**Table 1 Research Setting Fit with the ISC 2011 Census**

|  | <i>Case Study 2011</i> | <i>ISC 2011 Census<br/>(Average for all ISC schools)</i> |
|--|------------------------|--|
| Number of pupils                                     | 862                    | 406  |
| Ethnic minorities                                    | 39%                    | 25%  |
| Termly fee   | £2974                  | £3622  |
| Pupil : Teacher ratio                                | 12.0 : 1               | 11.0 : 1   |
| Staff turnover (average)                             | 9.3%                   | 11.7%  |
| Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities | 16.5%                  | 15.3%  |

There was in 2010/2011 a total of 81 full time teaching staff at the school. Over the past five years the school has had a low turnover rate, suggesting an overall contentment amongst staff. Another source of evidence would be the positive atmosphere at x school which is demonstrated at events such as Open Mornings via parental feedback.

The table below highlights staff retention over a five-year period:

**Table 2 Staff Retention**

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Number of full time staff that left</i> |
|-------------|--|
| 2009/2010   | 1  |
| 2008/2009   | 6  |
| 2007/2008   | 8  |
| 2006/2007   | 6  |
| 2005/2006   | 10   |

The school has an entirely new and restructured senior management team formed in 2007, as well as a new headteacher appointed in 2010. Geographically, the school is part urban, part rural, with seven-tenths of its pupils from within the city boundary, and the remainder travelling in for up to an hour. Again this is not untypical of an independent school, suggesting that a significant number of pupils are sacrificing time and dealing with inconvenience in order to attend school. They expect to be taught well, placing pressure on staff to deliver high quality learning and teaching which will lead to school improvement.

The senior management team consists of:

- Headteacher:
- Three deputy headteachers:
- One school administrator.

There are heads of department for the following subjects:

Art, Biology, Boys' PE/Games, Chemistry, Classics, Critical Thinking, Design Technology, Drama, Economics/Business Studies, English, Geography, Girls' PE/Games, History, ICT/Computing, Law, Learning Development, Maths, Modern Languages, Music, Outdoor Education, Physics, Psychology, Religious Studies.

The 2004 ISI Report found that there was a need to:

“improve consultation between senior management and heads of department in academic planning” and “clarify the roles of senior management and heads of department in implementation of the school’s academic policies and in monitoring their effectiveness” (ISI, 2004).

These points formed the basis of the main recommendations put forward following the inspection. The 2004 ISI Report also went on to point out that:

“Heads of department provide mainly good or very good leadership and management within their immediate spheres, but a lack of effective co-ordination between senior and middle management, which exists in some areas of the school’s work, leads to uneven application of otherwise sound policies, and to insufficiently rigorous monitoring and review.” (ISI, 2004).

The 2010 ISI Report highlighted:

“The excellent leadership and management of the school support all of its aims, notably the development of the pupils’ academic and personal potential. Management structures have been significantly refined and enhanced since the last inspection, including the appointment of a new senior management team. Senior leaders have designated management roles that are recognised by staff and pupils. This development, complemented by the restructuring of the pastoral system, has led to more focused support of the academic and pastoral life of the school. The hallmark of the management of the school is a strategy of research and evaluation before developments are made.”

(ISI, 2010)

It also stated that:

“the response to the recommendations in the last report has been positive. Heads of department confirm that they feel very well supported by the senior managers. This has led to heads of department being more successful in the implementation of academic policies, particularly with regard to assessment and the support of pupils with LDD. Departments now carry out departmental reviews that include curriculum analysis and staff appraisal. These, in turn, contribute to departmental development plans which are clearly linked to the school development plan. Reviews of the needs of heads of department have stimulated in-service training for them in departmental self-evaluation and work scrutiny” (ISI, 2010).

Clearly from this evidence an improvement has taken place, but I wanted to investigate in more detail whether x school had the capacity for further and sustained improvement and to ascertain if x school was building leadership capacity.

After carefully analysing the ISI Reports of both 2004 and 2010, and taking into account my own experience of and interest in leadership issues as well as school improvement, I set about framing my research questions as follows:

1. What are heads of department and the senior management team's perspectives on distributed leadership?
2. To what extent, if at all, do they feel the school is benefiting from distributed leadership?
3. To what extent do they feel the school is practising distributed leadership?
4. What ideas do they have for extending distributed leadership in the future?

In essence I wished to discover if distributed leadership was in evidence in any shape or form at x school and, if it does exist, whether it contributed to school improvement. My research questions were framed in such a way as to enable me to ascertain the link(s) between distributed leadership in theory and in practice at x school. I anticipated that there would be a gap between what is understood to be distributed leadership by heads of department at x school, what happens in practice in terms of distributed leadership at x school and what the literature and theories state about distributed leadership.

To this end a case study approach was adopted as it gave an opportunity for one key aspect of a problem to be studied in a degree of depth (Bell, 2005). Nisbet and Watt argue that a case study is a specific instance which illustrates a more general principle and Adelman et al point out that it is “the study of an instance in action” (Adelman et al, 1980). Concentrating my efforts on one case could have wider implications for schools with similar settings, as my aim was to “illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (Denscombe, 2007, p.36). Cohen, Manion and Morrison point out that case studies are able to establish cause and effect and that one of the key strengths of them is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Nisbet and Watt note that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Nisbet and Watt, 1984).

Hitchcock and Hughes focus upon seven key traits of a case study:

1. It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.
2. It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case.
3. It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.
4. It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.
5. It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.
6. The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
7. An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report. (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.317)

Hitchcock and Hughes go on to say that case studies are set in organisational, institutional, geographical and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case. They can be defined with reference to characteristics defined by the individuals and groups involved as well as being defined by participants' roles and functions in the case (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

During my research I utilised a variety of research methods. The methodological approach I took was very much influenced by my research questions which aimed to "discover rather than to test variables" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.12). My natural curiosity as a historian influenced me to take a qualitative approach in order to make sense of the organisational culture and degree of distributed leadership in my place of work. The research focus shaped the methods chosen in order to answer the research questions with "ingenuity and incisiveness" (Charmaz, 2006, p.15). More than one research method was used in order to collect rich data and to develop the properties of emerging categories through saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.61). It is also the depth of substance that can make a difference between "thin, uninteresting findings, and findings that have the potential to make a difference in policy and practice" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.306).

The sources of data chosen for theoretical relevance included interviews, observations, documents (school policies) and questionnaires. This mixed method approach of data collection allowed for weaknesses in one method to be compensated for by strengths in another method, as well as using triangulation in order to "look at the research topic from a variety of

perspectives, as a means of comparison and contrast” (Denscombe, 2007, p.134). If an insider-researcher merely concentrates on one picture of a “slice of reality” then they may be susceptible to bias due to tacit ties already developed with certain interviewees (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.141). Therefore, there is a danger of the interviewee feeling obliged to tell the researcher what they need to hear. The diverse methods of data collection also went some way to help with comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.62).

As a teacher and as a researcher, I had a responsibility for “duty of care” in relation to all those participating in my research. Behaving in an ethical manner increased the chances of maintaining positive relationships between researcher and participants for the duration of the research. It was absolutely essential to obtain voluntary consent under the mantle of overt research (Burgess, 1989). Participants in the research had full knowledge and comprehension of the subject matter as well as the role of the researcher.

Practitioner research faces the challenges of balancing power, ownership and voice, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent. In order to address these ethical issues, the guidelines that follow were established before the research was undertaken.

My role as a research-practitioner was to:

- Undertake overt research.
- Show respect to all participants.

- Ensure that participation was voluntary.
- Give participants the right to withdraw their given consent at any time.
- Obtain informed consent from all participants.

All research participants would:

- Need to have a full understanding of the research purposes and whether there were risks involved.
- Be given a brief statement of the purpose of the research.
- Be given a brief statement on the proposed methods of data generation.
- Be given a form for them to sign to confirm their informed consent.
- Be continually updated.

Collection of data:

- Data would be collected from normal processes already taking place at the school.
- Permission would be sought to access data (documents) already at the school.
- All data would be stored securely on a laptop and backed up to external storage.
- All raw data would be destroyed once the study had been completed.

Presenting the results of the research:

- Anonymity and confidentiality would be assured.

- Statements by participants would be distributed throughout the research, but alias names would be used instead of the participants' real names when adding statements.
- No reference would be made to a name or position of the participant.
- Release of data would be gained from all participants for the final thesis.

(Mohr, 2001, p.9; BERA, 2004)

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) highlight that the writing up of a case study is governed by the twin ideals of “fitness for purpose” and “fitness for audience”. Six different forms of writing up a case study are put forward by Robson (2002) and it is the “narrative report” form that best suited my case study. I have provided a prose account interspersed with relevant figures, tables, emergent issues, analysis and a conclusion.

In terms of Methodology I have adopted case study research and in particular an educational case study. Bassey (2005) argues that the term “educational” puts the definition in the context of educational research rather than discipline research in educational settings. Here, educational research is defined as critical enquiry focused upon informing educational judgements and key decisions so that educational action can be enhanced.

The methodological process I have followed mirrors that advanced by Bassey (1999). This clearly states that an educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is:

- Conducted in a localised boundary.
- Into interesting aspects of an educational activity, programme, institution or system.
- In its natural context and within an ethic of respect for people.
- In order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers.
- Such that enough data is collected for the researcher to be able to:
  - a) explore significant features of the case
  - b) create effective interpretations of what is found
  - c) test the trustworthiness of the interpretations
  - d) construct a worthwhile argument
  - e) relate the argument to any relevant research in the literature
  - f) convey the argument to an audience
  - g) provide an audit trail.

(Bassegy, 1999, p.58)

Bassegy (2005) highlights seven key stages in conducting case study research as follows:

“identifying the research purpose; asking research questions; drawing up ethical guidelines; collecting and storing data; creating and testing analytical statements; interpreting analytical statements; and deciding upon an outcome and publishing.”

It is these stages that I have followed when carrying out my case study research.

Any conclusions drawn will link the findings with the underpinning literature and key concepts of the distributed leadership approach, whilst providing a basis on which to put forward recommendations both for x school and for future research. In order to have impact, any recommendations made will be communicated to the senior management team (SMT) of x school and it is hoped that the research may be published in appropriate academic journals.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of my research was to investigate the issue of how effectively distributed leadership can contribute to school improvement as related to middle managers (head of department) at x school. To do this I first needed to focus upon a definition of distributed leadership and examine whether there is a single accepted model/theory, or whether it is the subject of debate and yet to be completely articulated. Thus the initial challenge was to arrive at a clear working definition through an examination of the different models and theories of distributed leadership. I then needed to assess the link it has to school improvement before relating this to my particular context and field of research.

In essence distributed leadership can be defined as focusing upon sharing leadership across an organisation. For example, it has been suggested by Spillane that:

“Distributed leadership often is cast as some sort of monolithic construct when, in fact, it is merely an emerging set of ideas that frequently diverge from one another.” (Spillane, 2005:144).

Spillane goes on to say:

“Distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures”

(Spillane, 2005:146).

In the context of a school, distributed leadership models importantly should lead to the development of learning-centred leaders with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of teaching, learning and pupil outcomes within the wider context of school improvement. Also implicit within the model of distributed leadership are the leadership practices of teachers, either as informal leaders or in more formal leadership roles such as head of department. This is highlighted in articles from the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, such as *Working Together is Success* (NCSL, 2009) and *Everyone a Leader* (NCSL, 2008). Harris and Muijs argue that leadership in the distributed leadership model can be found in the human potential available within an organisation (Harris and Muijs, 2003).

Those who have investigated the field of school improvement such as Fullan (Fullan, 2001), Hopkins and Jackson (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003:95) and Harris (Harris, 2003) argue that capacity-building is an effective way of generating and sustaining school improvement. At the heart of capacity-building, it would appear, is distributed leadership in conjunction with other factors such as trust. Leadership in this sense rests in the amount of human potential available to be utilised within a school, as Gronn (2000) mentions "an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise". Thus it has been shown that the internal capacity for development in a school can be augmented through distributed leadership. school improvement research has shown that distributed leadership focuses upon how leadership practice is distributed /shared among formal and informal leaders. Spillane argues that distributed leadership draws

together the actions of many individuals in a school who work at mobilising and guiding other teachers in the process of instructional change (Spillane et al, 2001). It can extend the boundaries of leadership as it revolves around high levels of “teacher involvement” and involves a variety of “expertise, skill and input” as Harris and Lambert point out (Harris and Lambert, 2003:16).

Hopkins (2009) when analysing the changing nature and framework of school improvement argues that schools traditionally were not seen as vehicles for making a difference to students’ learning. Thus the impact of a school upon the life of a student was seen as minimal. He goes on to argue that it is only in more recent times (perhaps the last 30 years or so) that schools have been seen to make a significant difference to student outcomes. There appears to be a broad consensus amongst researchers like Hopkins (2009) that eight criteria represent the organisational factors which depict an effective school as follows:

- curriculum-focused school leadership
- supportive climate in the school
- emphasis on curriculum and teaching
- clear goals and high expectations for students
- a system for monitoring performance and achievement
- ongoing staff development and in-service training
- parental involvement and support
- local authority and external support

Hopkins (2009) points out, though, that these factors do not and cannot address the core dynamics of a school as an organisation. There is a need for four process factors which add weight to school improvement. These factors are defined as:

- a feel for the actual process of leadership
- an articulated value system which links to clear goals and rules, high expectations and so on
- strong interaction and communication both horizontally and vertically
- planning and implementation that is collaborative in nature.

Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) have argued that school improvement as an approach to educational change and development has passed through three ages. Hopkins (2009) points out that we are now in the third age of school improvement in which the enhancement of the quality of teaching needs to be the core theme of any strategy for improvement. This impacts upon the leadership of academic middle managers, which in my case study in x school is heads of department. It forms a crucial part of the pressure, expectations and issues current in x school. For example, improving the quality of teaching in order to improve exam results is a fundamental part of the work associated with heads of department in x school. There is little in the literature specifically pertaining to academic middle management but there is some consensus on the pressures facing them in terms of school improvement as stated above in relation to developing and improving the quality of teaching as it needs to be at the core of any improvement strategy. In x school this also relates to the

pressure upon heads of department to improve exam results, in particular to increase the percentage of A\*, A and B grade passes at A Level while at GCSE Level it is a case of focusing upon improving the percentage of A\* and A grade passes. In more recent years (post 2008), as the recession took hold, improved financial management has also been a key pressure on heads of department as budgets have been frozen and waste carefully monitored by Line Managers. This is even more pressing of late as x school is in the Independent sector and, as the recession has taken hold, student numbers have fallen; therefore, potential income and revenue for the school has been diminished, and indeed has fallen in real terms. As parents pay fees and as times get tough and sacrifices are made to engineer the maintenance of student places by parents, the expectations upon the school increase in terms of academic outcomes and leavers' destinations. This is another pressure faced by heads of department (and indeed by senior management). Thus it is a vertical and horizontal pressure related to school improvement in the wider sense.

Hopkins (2009) states that the first age of school improvement was focused upon organisational change, self-evaluation, external support for schools and the beginnings of leadership training. The second age strategies comprised an acceleration of students' achievement, linking it to effective management practices within the school. He goes further to argue that the first and second ages of school improvement have made little sustained impact upon levels of learning amongst students. This is where the third age comes into play for Hopkins, manifested in a policy of making sure that achievement and learning

of students is at the core of all that teachers do. In this way the improved quality of teaching needs to be the central theme of any improvement strategy. It also requires sustained professional learning opportunities. As a result, schools need to exhibit amongst other facets very high levels of expectation of both teachers and students and an unrelenting focus on the quality of learning and teaching, as well as developing a work culture that takes pride in celebrating and sharing excellence and has a high degree of trust.

Stoll (1999) puts forward the argument that the ultimate goal of school improvement must be to enhance student progress, achievement and development as well as to prepare them for an ever changing world. She advocates that research into school effectiveness and school improvement indicates that the classroom effect is greater than the whole school effect in determining and accounting for student progress (Creemers, 1994; Hill, 1997; Reynolds et al., 1996). It is made clear that what interests and motivates teachers the most is what goes on between them and their students; imposing a central focus on this is therefore of paramount and fundamental importance for successful schools. This necessitates a focus upon learning and teaching, especially learning – what is referred to as “the treasure within” (Delors et al., 1996). In x school this is very true and can relate quite succinctly to the issues facing academic middle managers in terms of improving exam results and raising student performance.

When analysing the school learning context in more detail, Stoll (1999) looks at internal capacity for improvement and highlights a number of key factors such as relationships between teachers, morale, power issues and,

importantly, leadership. Stoll argues that countless studies such as Mortimore (1998) have evidenced that positive leadership is a powerful force for school effectiveness and school improvement. So, for Stoll, school improvement is not a quick fix in any sense – it is a complex and long-term initiative (Stoll and Myers, 1998). For her it revolves around people working together to bring about fundamental changes in learning and teaching. Real improvement involves challenge and accountability as well as helping schools to understand and develop their own capacity. Thus there is a need for a focus upon the individual and their context, as without such a focus the opportunity for deep and lasting change is diminished.

It has been pointed out that school improvement more often than not involves change in some form or another but that not all change results in school improvement (Harris, 2002; Fullan, 1991). Some change can damage school development, and some can be so convoluted that it is virtually impossible to bring about. A school that is improving is often well served by a body of staff who are committed to bringing about improvement and cultural change. This change for school improvement purposes needs to be sustained over time which is a difficult task in itself. The case has been made for the fact that distributed leadership has the ability to strengthen management and succession planning, as well as (when applied across different people and structures) the ability to improve school effectiveness and develop school improvement. This can be achieved in a formal manner through structures or informally by developing groups on an ad hoc basis based upon expertise and need at that time (Gunter, Hall and Bragg, 2013).

Hargreaves (2011) argues that leadership in schools was weakly distributed and remained largely with the Head Teacher when the traditional model of leadership is scrutinised. However, it would appear that over time more senior staff have been given leadership roles along with middle leaders. This is important because it is only when staff believe they are given real and regular opportunities to carry out leadership activities that they fully use their talents and share their knowledge and skills with others. Distributed leadership therefore has the ability to act as a catalyst for offering appropriate professional development to those staff who are identified as having high leadership potential (Hargreaves, 2011). When examining professional development through distributed leadership, Hargreaves (2011) notes there are four distinct phases: Beginning, Developing, Embedding and Leading. In the Beginning phase most leadership is distributed to senior and middle leaders who have been sent on pertinent external courses and training programmes. In the Developing phase leadership opportunities are gradually extended to all staff and more focus is put upon in-house development of leaders. In the Embedding phase leadership is distributed and its development is inextricably linked to all professional development practice as well as being closely linked to mentoring and coaching. Finally, in the Leading phase leadership development is integrated into all professional development for staff (Hargreaves, 2011).

It has been noted that sustainable school improvement can be derived from creating a culture of distributed leadership throughout the school community as well as developing leadership capacity. Leadership capacity which

engenders school improvement must refer to a broad-based and skilled level of involvement in the work of leadership. This work of leadership links to shared learning, leading a shared purpose and action. To bring about school improvement the Head is a leader but not a sole leader because other members of staff have key leadership roles. Having a broad base of leadership in a school setting can ensure that school improvement becomes the norm. An issue here is that the development of leadership capacity is very much a desired outcome for a school but at the same time is extremely challenging. Building leadership capacity suggests a different model of power relations within a school as well as a change to authority within a school as an organisation. It suggests that leadership is a shared activity and that all teachers within a school should be involved in the process. This would then lead to a shared purpose and ambition for all. This process of all teachers being involved in leadership can help to create a scenario where school improvement becomes the norm in a school. Thus leadership capacity relates to skilled and broad direct involvement in the work of leadership. The work of leadership will then involve shared learning which will lead to shared action as well as purpose. In a school setting, then, the headteacher is one leader out of many leaders in the institution.

Much of the literature suggests that for school improvement to be a success each school involved in the process needs to effectively manage change and development (Harris and Muijs, 2005). In turn, improvement should focus upon developing teaching and learning which should be supported by changes to management structures which will result in higher levels of student

achievement. This is then linked to building leadership capacity which will empower the school involved to change and develop. As stated, this can be a real challenge and be quite a profound change in a school as an organisation. As a process it will also be different from school to school and, as Harris and Muijs (2005) point out, a key factor in capacity-building is the human angle. If teachers are at the heart of change and development, there is a better opportunity for the organisation to grow. In creating the capacity for improvement a school is able to extend the potential and ability of teachers to work and lead more effectively in a collaborative way. This can be very positive for school improvement. The literature also highlights the fact that distributing leadership to teachers can have a positive impact on transforming a school on an organisation-wide basis.

Effective school improvement programmes share certain traits such as a sharp focus upon classroom improvement, the fact that change takes place at a number of levels and the creation of a change in culture as well as structure within the organisation (Harris and Muijs, 2005). There is of course a variance in approach from one organisation to another; however, some aspects are common and necessary for effective school improvement to occur. These are a focus upon teaching and learning, professional development and distributed leadership. The literature goes on to emphasise the fact that at the very heart of school improvement is a new way of teachers and management working together for the good of the school. Key improvements and thus key changes will arise from senior managers and teachers both taking on the role of

leaders and making shared decisions. As a result, top-down forms of delegation are a thing of the past.

distributed leadership in action has at the core of its success the engagement of numerous people in leadership activity. According to Hopkins and Jackson, distributed leadership happens when:

“leadership and organisational growth collide and by definition, it is dispersed or distributed” (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003, p. 99).

So here distributed leadership harnesses and enhances the skills and knowledge of all those within a school to create a common culture that is able to function in a positive and effective manner. Harris goes on to point out that the success of distributed leadership within a school can be influenced by a number of interpersonal factors like relationships with school management and other teachers (Harris, 2004). The importance in relation to school improvement lies in colleagues’ ability to influence each other, giving due regard to developing positive relations with school management. These two core areas – a definition of, and models of, distributed leadership, and the possible link to school improvement – will now be examined in detail.

It has been noted that there has been a growth in interest globally in educational leadership and management, and an acceptance that leadership is second only to classroom practice in terms of impact on school improvement in the sense of student outcomes (Bush et al, 2009). The impact of leadership on student outcomes has been shown to be significantly greater

than previously believed especially in cases where leaders engage directly with teachers to develop classroom practices (Leithwood et al, 2006; Robinson, 2007). Leadership thus may be devoid of any formal position and may rely upon an influence process. It may also reside in teams and groups as well as in individuals. Bush et al (2009) point out that distributed leadership is in vogue and in turn this is linked to the understanding that there can be greater “purchase” if leadership involves the many rather than the few. Harris argues that leadership is being viewed increasingly as an organisation-wide concept where distributed leadership is able to make a significant contribution to organisational growth and success (Harris, 2009).

The most recent evidence suggests a positive relationship between distributed leadership, organisational improvement and student achievement (Hallinger and Heck, 2009; Harris, 2008, 2009; Leithwood and Mascall, 2008; Louis et al., 2009). Thus distributed leadership is seen as an important factor in contributing to positive organisational change and improvement; but there are still questions to be answered before any direct action is taken.

Harris also points out that distributed leadership symbolises one of the key influential ideas to emerge in the field of educational leadership (Harris, 2009; Hallinger and Heck, 2009). The notion of distributed leadership is advocated by researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and educational reformers worldwide (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009; Spillane, 2006). The concept itself has aroused much argument and debate as well as controversy in the area of school leadership.

It should be noted that there are concerns and criticisms of distributed leadership as an idea. Gunter and Ribbins (2003, p. 132) state that:

“while distributed leadership tends to be seen as normatively a good thing, it has also been contested... most notably because of the complexities of who does the distribution and who is in receipt of distribution”.

The evidence base which portrays a positive relationship between distributed leadership and learning outcomes is still an emerging one (Leithwood et al., 2006). This links to the work of people like Hatcher (2005); Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008) and Hargreaves and Fink (2009) who all raise questions about the motivation behind people who promote the idea of distributed leadership. They argue that the concept of distributed leadership is used as a cloak to enthuse teachers to take on a heavier burden of work as well as acting as a means of reinforcing standardisation practices.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p. 28) state that:

“Distributed patterns of leadership don’t always serve the greater good. Distributed leadership is sometimes bad leadership.”

The literature does highlight that there are issues associated with distributed leadership in a school setting. Storey (2004) points out that there can be situations arising with priorities, targets and timescales which all conflict. Timperley (2005, p. 64) states that:

“while distributed leadership among teachers may be desirable, some caution needs to be sounded about the potential difficulties involved”.

These critical perspectives are also still emerging, but should not be ignored as Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008:335) highlight the link between teacher leadership and distributed leadership as one that can cement authority and hierarchy so that the monitoring of predetermined standards takes place. This is not the view of all commentators though, but it should be acknowledged. However, Jackson and Temperley (2007) point out that a school is not going to transform without distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership is seemingly the leadership idea with the most prominent standing amongst leadership researchers at the time of writing, but it is not a radical new idea in the strict sense. The term has been used since the 1950s and 1960s. Gibb (1954) used it to explain the dynamics of the influence processes that impacted upon the work of a selection of formal and informal groups. In an attempt to measure the patterns of influence in small group settings, a distinction was made between focused and distributed leadership. Focused in that sense meant that the activity related to one person, while distributed meant that the leadership was shared as well as individuals taking the lead at key moments with influence thus shifting from one person to another. Shelley (1960) and Melnick (1982) use distributed leadership to articulate a difference of opinion amongst a team about the role of the leader which could in turn lead to a lack of stability. Barry (1991) used the term to describe a team that is self-managed which implies that a team can have many leaders sharing leadership roles. This assumes, then, the

cultivation and development of leadership skills within and amongst members of the team as well as the team needing those individual skills at some point. Thus the capacity for leadership can be extended.

In a school, then, as people take on leadership roles distributed leadership will develop as the leadership needs of the school will change. As an idea distributed leadership does not suggest that the formal leadership structures in a school should be removed or are redundant. Rather, it believes that there is a strong relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes. It also means that the holders of formal leadership roles in schools are the gatekeepers of distributed leadership practice (Harris, 2008). Distributed leadership theory is able to offer a powerful analytical frame for exploring the various ways in which leadership interactions at a formal and informal level take place within a school (Spillane et al., 2001).

Crawford (2012) when discussing solo and distributed leadership points out that the literature in the past decade or so has shown an emphatic move from solo to different forms of shared leadership. She adds that in England this move was as a result of the failures of the solo model which had seen some high profile heads unable to change the social practices of schools and raise achievement. Gronn (2009) refers to distributed leadership as a post-heroic alternative which gained momentum in the literature in the 1990s and 2000s.

Crawford goes on to point out that the literature seems to show that at the same time as distributed leadership apparently being a step change from solo leadership, it is still strongly aligned to the concepts of power and influence.

The literature throws up the issue that the likes of Gronn (2009) highlight which is that distributed leadership can still harness influence and power in the hands of the few. Thus, will autonomy be spread across an institution or will the same levels of constraint be maintained by leaders? This is a very pertinent factor which was highlighted in my case study school.

Crawford (2012) highlights that Gronn (2009) makes the valid point that solo leaders often feature in accounts which seemingly demonstrate distributed leadership and that the role of the individual in such accounts is not clearly defined. Gronn (2009) is critical as he believes that distributed leadership does not fully and effectively explain the different forms of leadership which can be in operation at the same time in an institution. He advocates a hybrid leadership model which better reflects the variety of leadership models which can be operational at the same time in the same institution. Crawford (2012) makes an excellent point in that, if an institution is to be a success and dynamic, then leadership is required to be evident throughout, be it distributed leadership or something else such as the hybrid model.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) argues that trust is a vital component of effective leadership in schools and has the capacity to create a successful learning environment. If school leaders are able to secure the trust of their community in the broadest sense, then a productive learning environment will follow. She states that at the heart of a productive and successful school lies trustworthy leadership. She adds that trust involves risk as well as acting as a glue in order to hold things together. It is the job of the headteacher to establish and maintain a culture of trust because they have the greatest power in terms of

relationships in a school. She argues that if a headteacher wants to feel trusted themselves then they must be willing and confident enough to extend their trust to teachers, support staff, pupils and parents.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) goes on to add that a trustworthy leader will be able to develop and expound a shared vision, coach colleagues, mitigate and manage any possible breakdown in trust, and personify trustworthy behaviour.

This approach, she argues, will rectify any issues with trust prior to them becoming so large that they cannot be effectively dealt with. She adds that a trustworthy leader will be humble and yet tenacious, a flexible problem-solver, not one to blame others and – importantly for my case study – involve teachers in making decisions.

Providing a distinct definition of distributed leadership is not a straightforward task. Whilst it is true that there is widespread interest in the idea of distributed leadership, there are many varied and at times conflicting interpretations of the term. Harris (2009) says it can prove to be “an elusive concept” (Harris, 2009:59). There are normative and theoretical definitions, and as a result the literature supporting distributed leadership as a concept is very broad and diverse (Bennet et al., 2003). The literature highlights the fact that the idea of distributed leadership links to shared (Pearce and Conger, 2003), collaborative (Wallace, 2002), democratic (Gastil, 1997) and participative (Vroom and Yago, 1998) leadership concepts. In this way distributed leadership can be used to explain any form of devolved, shared or dispersed leadership practice in a school. This has resulted in both the misuse of the term to mean any form of

team or shared leadership practice, and the misconception that distributed leadership means that everybody leads (Harris, 2007). Thus it is often used to mean very distinct and different things leading to discrepancies in meaning which can cause confusion (Mayrowetz, 2008). Harris (2007) points out that, despite there being recognition of the issue over definition, there are different conceptualisations and interpretations in existence.

Distributed leadership theory recognises that numerous people within an organisation have the potential to lead, but the key to successful outcomes is the way that leadership is facilitated and supported. Leithwood et al. (2007) have demonstrated that different patterns of distributed leadership are crucial in attaining organisational improvement. Spillane (2006) and Harris (2005) argue that central to the concept of distributed leadership is the notion that leadership is not to be practised by one person but that it is a fluid or emergent property. It is more of a dynamic organisational entity rather than the actions of an individual. Harris (2009) adds that distributed leadership can be positioned in relation to top-down models of leadership but it is not the opposite as it involves both the vertical and lateral dimensions of leadership practice. It also combines both formal and informal forms of leadership practice. This could be found to exist in subject departments in a school setting. It can be seen to be a form of lateral leadership where the practice of leadership is shared among the members of an organisation, resulting in the interaction of individuals rather than any form of individual direction. As Gronn (2000) says:

“it is an emergent property of a group or a network of interacting individuals”.

Spillane (2006) argues that distributed leadership is concerned with the co-performance of leadership and the reciprocal interdependencies that shape that leadership practice. This can include both formal and informal leaders.

Harris (2008) and Leithwood and Mascall (2008) argue that an institution benefits from wider leadership distribution. This can take different forms as some are random whilst others are more carefully established. Leithwood et al. (2009) argue in favour of planned and aligned distributed leadership so as to engender a focused approach. Day et al. (2009) and Harris (2008) put the case for a co-ordinated approach to distributed leadership and highlight the possible positive impact it can have on organisational outcomes. Harris (2008) goes on to argue that successful schools have restructured and redesigned so that leadership is deliberately more widely shared and spread. In this way roles and responsibilities have been remodelled and new teams created as well as flat structures established. This has provided individuals with a greater sense of responsibility and accountability. It has been argued that effective learning communities in schools can be created by extending leadership responsibility beyond the headteacher. Portin (1998) and Blase and Blase (1999) make the point that there is a positive relationship between organisational change and distributed leadership practice. There is evidence to suggest that school improvement can be brought about through teachers being involved in decision-making and the existence of strong collegial-type relationships. As Harris and Chapman (2002) point out, improvements in school performance can be achieved by headteachers working closely through teams as well as by involving groups of stakeholders in decision-

making. Harris and Muijs (2004) found, by analysing the relationship between teacher involvement in decision-making within a school and student outcomes, that there was a link between distributed leadership practice and positive student outcomes. It was shown that teacher and student morale was improved when the teachers believed that they were more involved in making decisions which pertained to school development and transition.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p. 72) make it clear that:

“in a complex, fast paced world, leadership cannot rest on the shoulders of the few... sustainable leadership is distributed leadership that ultimately stays centred on learning”.

For distributed leadership to work effectively in schools, the right conditions need to exist in terms of structure and culture. Also, headteachers will need to maximise the leadership capacity within their school so as to avoid leadership potential going to waste. To this end, flatter structures will need to be employed based upon collaboration which will see new professional relationships being built. The relationships, levels of trust and culture of the school will be very important to the success of distributed leadership practice within the school. Day et al. (2009) make the point that sustainable school improvement is secured by the support of the headteacher and the joint leadership of the headteacher and teacher. Some formal direction is necessary and the support of those in formal leadership roles is needed (Mascall et al., 2009).

Harris (2009) explains that not all distributed leadership is inherently good as it depends on the school and how ready it is to change, its culture and its developmental needs. It also depends upon the purpose and pattern of distribution as well as the relationships and trust within the school itself. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) state that distributed leadership is not an all-encompassing leadership practice which fits all schools in the same way. The literature suggests that distributed leadership is able to contribute to positive transformation and change in schools (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2006; Spillane, 2006). This point is augmented by the work of Parker (2015) who argues that distributed leadership in a framework sense and in the sense of practice has grown in status in recent years and in some primary schools is the dominant model. This has remained the case in essence since the election of 2010.

Bush (2013) notes that distributed leadership has evolved to become the preferred leadership model in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and there has been an increase in scholarly research into the field. He argues that distributed leadership should be seen in isolation from positional authority as leadership is not solely confined to formal leaders, and there is merit in drawing together all the expertise in an organisation. This is a notion I would concur with in terms of a broad definition. Bush and Glover (2014) note that there has been a growth in the overall importance of school leadership and this has been accompanied by the development of theory. This has seen new models emerging such as distributed leadership and thus well-established approaches have been redefined and further developed. They argue that

leadership models are subject to fashion but quite often serve the purpose of reflecting as well as informing changes to school leadership practice.

Harris (2013) believes that distributed leadership necessitates a key change in how formal leaders view their role. It means that the facilitating and supporting of the leadership of others in an organisation is key to the success of distributed leadership. Not everyone leads, and nor is everyone a leader. Leadership is not divided up and handed out to everyone in an organisation, and leadership is not a role and responsibility per se. Harris (2013) and Spillane (2006) argue that distributed leadership involves both the formal and informal forms of leadership practice within the framing, analysis and interpretation of it. It is fundamentally focused upon the co-performance of leadership, and this co-leadership involves both formal and informal leaders. I agree with this definition, and also it is interesting to note that increasingly studies are showing that there is a potential impact of distributed leadership upon the teaching and learning processes and outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2009). This has direct significance and relates to my case study.

Harris (2013) also highlights that broad-based involvement in leadership increases the efficiency of teachers as well as increasing their sense of commitment to the organisation. She goes on to argue that schools will require more significant leadership capacity and capability than ever before to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century education. A good place to start is to recognise that the job has become too big for one person as headteacher (Gunter, Hall and Bragg, 2013). Formal leaders will have to develop the leadership capability and capacity of others in their schools – it is a question of

developing leadership quality and capability, not simply having more leaders. This then means that formal leaders in schools will need to support those members of the organisation with the expertise to lead regardless of their position or place in the organisation. Linked to this notion of developing the capability and capacity for leadership is the importance of building relational trust in order for the distributed leadership to be real and authentic and not merely delegation (Harris 2013). This relates directly to my case study as will be seen later.

To summarise, the key attributes of distributed leadership can be represented as in the table below:

**Table 3 Key Attributes of distributed leadership**

| <i>Key attributes</i>            | <i>Theorist</i>   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Planned and coordinated          | Leithwood 2009, Day 2009, Harris 2008, Portin 1998, Blase & Blase 1999                                    |
| Trust is established             | Tchannen-Moran 2014, Fullan 2001, Harris 2009, Harris 2013, Hopkins 2009, Crawford 2012                   |
| Communication is important       | Harris 2004, Tchannen-Moran 2014  |
| Capacity building is evident     | Fullan 2001, Hopkins & Jackson 2003   |
| Supported by institution         | Leithwood 2007, Harris 2013, Harris 2003, Harris & Muijs 2005   |
| Many not one leader is necessary | Spillane 2006, Harris 2005, Harris 2009, Harris 2013, Bush 2013, Gunter, Hall & Bragg 2013, Crawford 2012 |

The key differences within the literature surrounding distributed leadership can be summarised in table format as shown below:

**Table 4 Key Differences of distributed leadership**

| <i>Difference</i>                                     | <i>Theorist</i>   |
|---|---|
| In favour of distributed leadership                   | Jackson & Temperley 2007, Harris 2009, Spillane 2006, Hargreaves 2011, Hopkins & Jackson 2003   |
| Against distributed leadership                        | Lumby 2013, Gunter & Ribbins 2003, Hatcher 2005, Fitzgerald & Gunter 2008, Hargreaves & Fink 2008, Gronn 2009   |
| distributed leadership is a form of delegation        | Harris 2013, Lumby 2013   |
| distributed leadership can empower                    | Crawford 2012, Gronn 2009, Hopkins 2009, Stoll 1999   |
| distributed leadership can lead to school improvement | Hopkins 2009, Stoll 1999, Gunter, Hall & Bragg 2013, Bush 2009, Leithwood 2006, Robinson 2007. Harris & Chapman 2002, Harris 2008, Harris 2009, Leithwood & Mascall 2008, Hallinger & Heck 2009 |
| distributed leadership is a hybrid structure          | Gronn 2009  |

So as Mayrowetz (2008) points out, it is important to assess the many usages of the term distributed leadership to understand the variation in meaning as well as to clearly make connections between them and school improvement. The literature highlights the limitations within the evidence base. However, Mascall et al. (2009) point out that there is little point in continuing to argue over the relative positions or perspectives on distributed leadership. The core challenge has to be measuring the degree and extent of any organisational impact and effect. Another challenge noted by Harris (2009), Leithwood et al.,

(2009) and Spillane (2006) is that of critically investigating distributed leadership practice which is what I will be doing with my case study.

In conclusion, distributed leadership receives a mixed press in the literature; in the simplest of terms it has its advocates such as Harris (2013) and it has its detractors like Lumby (2013). Distributed leadership does imply a shift in power and authority, and a challenge is the actual extent of the distribution of power and control (Harris 2013). The literature highlights examples of where power, influence and authority have been abused where a headteacher has been undermined. Also, as Lumby (2013) argues, distributed leadership is not a good thing per se and describes a situation having arisen from the theory of a fantasy world where staff are allegedly empowered and have more control. However, the contribution of leadership (including distributed leadership) to school improvement is clearly evident in the literature. Indeed, it is pointed out that research from diverse countries such as the United States of America arrives at similar conclusions with regard to the need for leadership to facilitate school improvement.

The one notable exception to the above is the distinct lack of evidence pertaining to distributed leadership and school improvement within the private sector of education – especially within the United Kingdom. There are a number of reasons why this situation may have arisen. Firstly, there has always been a lack of a research culture within the private sector as compared to the maintained sector – this is certainly my own personal experience. Secondly, the literature can be seen in a generic way and thus the research findings and recommendations can effectively apply to any and

every educational context in the broadest sense. Hence there is no specific private school literature. This does not detract though in any way, shape or form from the literature and research that appears above or indeed in the following chapters. Therefore, this study will provide some limited evidence regarding the development of distributed leadership in the independent school sector.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

In order to investigate the issue of how effectively distributed leadership at middle management (head of department) level can contribute to school improvement at x school in the West Midlands I investigated the role and nature of leadership within the school at present and in particular examined the effectiveness of it at head of department level. Through my research I wanted to be able to see to what extent leadership is distributed currently at this level and how it may be distributed more widely. The effectiveness of the distributed leadership identified was then considered and to what extent it links to school improvement in terms of learning and teaching. This can then be related to capacity-building as a way of creating/shaping and sustaining school improvement. This research mainly lent itself to qualitative research methodology in a systematic way to answer a question, collect evidence, produce findings that were not pre-determined and produce findings which can be applied beyond the boundaries of the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

Qualitative research seeks to understand a specific given research problem or topic area from the perspective(s) of the population it involves. Also, it is very effective in securing culturally specific information and data about the values, behaviours and opinions held by particular groups/populations and the social settings in which they exist. Indeed, a strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide detailed textual analysis of how people experience a given research issue. It is also able to provide information about the human side of an issue which can involve the beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of

different individuals. Qualitative methods can also be good at identifying and highlighting the more intangible factors associated with an issue, such as gender roles and ethnicity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Distributed leadership has been studied by using qualitative research methodology on many occasions in both educational and non-educational settings. I have selected two educational examples to illustrate this: one by Harris and Chapman (2002) and the other by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001).

For Harris and Chapman (2002) the notion of distributed leadership is viewed as coterminous with democratic leadership, and they examine it by reference to the structural arrangements and actions by a headteacher which may create it in the institutions at the centre of their research. The methods of study were made up of semi-structured interviews with headteachers, middle managers and so on as well as utilising a wide range of documentary and contextual data.

Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) provide a qualitative study of 13 Chicago-based elementary schools where they argue that distributed leadership is the process of thinking and acting in a particular situation. For them, leadership in a school should be seen as thinking and acting in a given situation in such a way that teaching and learning are effectively facilitated. Their analysis puts forward the idea that leadership tasks are often distributed among multiple leaders and thus leadership analysis can be better undertaken

at group rather than individual level, so that distributed leadership should be analysed on a situation-by-situation or task-by-task basis.

Some of the key aspects of a qualitative research approach are as follows. The general framework seeks to explore phenomena. The instruments use more flexible, iterative styles of eliciting and categorising responses to questions. Semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation are utilised. The analytical objectives are primarily to describe variation and to describe and explain relationships, individual experiences and group norms whilst the question format is open-ended. The data format is textual which is achieved through audiotapes and field notes, and there is flexibility in study design which may, for example, allow for the addition, exclusion or rewording of particular interview questions. Participant responses can affect how and which questions the researcher asks next. The study design is iterative as data collection and research questions can be adjusted according to what is learned.

Perhaps the most important aspect and key component of qualitative methods is their flexibility, and it is this that sets them apart from quantitative methods and makes them so different. Increased flexibility allows for greater levels of spontaneity and adaption of the interaction between the researcher and the study participant. An example would be that qualitative methods ask, for the most part, open-ended questions that are not necessarily worded in exactly the same way for each and every participant. By utilising open-ended questions participants are free to respond in their own words, and these

responses thus tend to be more detailed than a simple “yes” or “no” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2011).

Also, when using qualitative methods, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is often less formal than in quantitative research. Participants are able to respond in a more elaborate and detailed way than is typical of quantitative methods. As a result, researchers are able to respond and react immediately to what a participant says by tailoring subsequent questions to the information already received from the participant.

The qualitative researcher has to work hard to attune themselves to a distinctiveness of a particular context. A great deal depends on what one sees and hears and therefore much depends on one’s powers of observation and listening. These skills involve to a large extent those associated with social management. Thus it involves the negotiation of access into both private places and thoughts and will develop the kind of trust and rapport which will encourage people to relax, be natural and go about their everyday business in their usual manner in the researcher’s presence and as a consequence not hold anything back in an interview. So, it is clear that good social management will ensure that there are worthwhile things to be seen and heard (Thomas, 2011).

Effective observational skills are also necessary. These involve vision in the sense of seeing and taking in a wide range of activity over a period of time. This includes the skills of scanning (to ensure that as wide a slice of activity as possible is covered) and discernment (the ability to select specific aspects for

more concentrated scrutiny). Likewise, skills are needed for interviewing – one must display understanding of and empathy with the interviewee. This is necessary in order to penetrate “fronts” and access people’s self and innermost confidences. Other skills such as “active listening” whereby one shows the other person that you hear and react; “focusing” which keeps the interviewee to the subject; “infilling” and “explicating” where there is incomplete material; “checking” for accuracy and “identifying” clues and indicators are all essential. However, the interview is not just a device for information gathering. It is a process which constructs reality to which both parties contribute and by which both are affected (Thomas, 2011; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

As described in Chapter 1, a case study approach has been adopted as it gives an opportunity for one key aspect of a problem to be studied in a degree of depth (Bell, 2005) while illustrating a more general principle (Nisbet and Watt, 1984) which could have wider implications for schools with similar settings. As Thomas (2011) says:

“there are two important things about a case study: you drill down further and you create a three-dimensional picture – or what Foucault called a polyhedron of intelligibility.”

(Thomas, 2011 p.4).

Foucault argues that humanities and social sciences inquiries can be too one-dimensional so he advances the notion of looking at things from a number of

directions in order to achieve a more rounded, richer and balanced view (Foucault, 1981).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) highlight a number of distinct advantages to case studies such as that case study data is “strong in reality” and other research data is often “weak in reality”. This strength in reality is because case studies are found to be more down to earth, hold one’s attention and link to the researcher’s personal experience. Case studies focus upon the subtlety of the case in its own right, recognising the complexity and embeddedness of social truths, and as such are able to represent elements of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints of participants.

Case studies can offer support to alternative interpretations, having the potential to create an archive of descriptive material which may be rich enough to allow subsequent reinterpretation. They are also part of a process which can lead to action. They start in a world of action and thus can contribute to it. The insights they create may be directly interpreted and utilised by staff for self-development, for feedback to the wider institution, for formative evaluation or even for educational policy-making. Finally, case studies present research or evaluation data in a far more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report and are thus capable of serving multiple audiences. They reduce the dependence of the reader upon unstated implicit assumptions, and this in turn makes the research process itself accessible.

Nisbet and Watt (1984, p.79-92) suggest the following points as strengths of a case study:

1. The results are better understood by a wide audience as they are more frequently written in everyday (non-professional) language.
2. They are immediately intelligible and speak for themselves.
3. They incorporate unique features which may get lost in large-scale data, and it is precisely these unique features which might hold the key to understanding the situation.
4. They are strong on reality.
5. They are able to provide insights into other, similar situations and cases.
6. They are able to be undertaken by a single researcher.
7. They are able to embrace and extend upon unanticipated events.

However, as expected, there are some weaknesses to a case study approach:

1. The results may not be generalisable.
2. They are not easily cross-checked and as a result they can prove to be selective, biased and subjective.
3. They can fall victim to observer bias.

(Nisbet and Watt, 1984, p.79-92).

During my research I have utilised a variety of research methods. The methodological approach I have undertaken has been very much influenced by my research questions that aim to “discover rather than to test variables” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.12). My natural curiosity as a historian has

influenced a qualitative approach in order to make sense of the organisational culture and degree of distributed leadership in my place of work. The research focus has shaped the methods chosen in order to answer the research questions with “ingenuity and incisiveness” (Charmaz, 2006, p.15). More than one research method has been used in order to collect rich data resulting in a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of distributed leadership practice within the research setting as well as to develop the properties of emerging categories through saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is also the depth of substance that can make a difference between:

“thin, uninteresting findings, and findings that have the potential to make a difference in policy and practice”

(Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.306).

The sources of data chosen for theoretical relevance included interviews, observations and questionnaires.

I have adopted a qualitative approach as one of my analytical objectives is to explain variations in leadership relationships at middle management level. My data format has been qualitative in that it has been textually derived from audiotapes and field notes amongst other sources. Also there is flexibility in my methodology which is a key component of qualitative research; for example, my question technique has been for the most part to include open-ended questions allowing spontaneity and detailed answers from participants. By contrast, quantitative research attempts to confirm hypotheses about phenomena and utilises a more rigid approach to eliciting and then

categorising participants' responses using a closed-ended question format; as such it tends to be more structured in approach. A mixed-method approach of data collection allows for weaknesses in one method to be compensated for by strengths in another method, as well as using triangulation in order to:

“look at the research topic from a variety of perspectives, as a means of comparison and contrast.” (Denscombe, 2007, p.134).

If an insider-researcher merely concentrates on one picture of a “slice of reality” then they may be susceptible to bias due to tacit ties already developed with certain interviewees (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.141). Therefore, there is a danger of the interviewee feeling obliged to tell the researcher what they need to hear. I have been very aware of this issue in my research approach as I have a direct involvement and connection with the research setting. The concept of validity can become problematic with insider research because of the researcher's involvement with the subject of study. Positivists argue that because of their involvement and link the researcher is no longer objective and results may be distorted. However, there are also advantages to insider research; for example, the insider researcher has a wealth of knowledge which an outsider researcher does not have access to. Also, interviewees may well feel more comfortable and freer to talk openly if familiar with the researcher. In this way from the anti-positivist viewpoint insider research has the ability to increase validity due to the extra layers of richness, authenticity and honesty of the information. However, it should be noted that one can never guarantee the openness and honesty of subjects and our research will always be influenced by our subjectivities – complete

objectivity is impossible. I have endeavoured to minimise the impact of biases on the research process and ensure it is transparent and honest. The diverse methods of data collection also go some way to help comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I have used two key qualitative methods in my research: interviews and questionnaires.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue that interviews enable participants (interviewers and interviewees) to discuss their interpretations of their own world experiences and to express situations from their personal perspective. In this very real sense, then, an interview is not simply collecting some data about life: it is part and parcel of life itself and its human embeddedness is inescapable. This is an approach I agree with and one I tapped into readily as I gathered my data. At the same time Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) make the point that interviews are a flexible tool for data collection as they predominantly allow multi-sensory channels to be utilised including verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. The order of the interview can be controlled whilst still permitting some spontaneity and the interviewer can push for complete responses which address complex issues.

“The interview is a powerful implement for researchers.”

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.349).

However, interviews are time-consuming and can be open to interviewer bias. Dyer (1995) points out that interviews are not the same as ordinary, everyday conversations as they have specific purposes. As such the researcher has a duty of care to ensure that the interview is set up effectively.

Kitwood (1977) highlights three conceptions of an interview. The first is as a potential means of pure information transfer; second is that of a transaction which will contain bias that needs recognition and control; and third, that of an encounter which shares many of the features of everyday life.

“If the interviewer does his job well, asks questions in an acceptable manner and if the respondent is sincere and well-motivated, accurate data may be obtained.”

(Kitwood, 1977 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.349).

The purpose of an interview in everyday life and its wider context is varied, such as gathering data in a survey or sampling respondents' opinions, but when employed as a distinctive research technique interviews are able to serve three purposes. Firstly, they can be used as the principal means of information gathering, which has a direct bearing on the research objectives; “by providing access to what is inside a person's head it makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)” (Tuckman, 1972 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.351). Secondly they can be used to test hypotheses or indeed suggest new ones, or be used as an explanatory device to help identify variables and/or relationships. Thirdly, interviews can effectively be used in conjunction with other research methods. Indeed, Kerlinger (1970) amongst others suggests interviews can validate other research methods.

I carried out two main kinds of interview as a research tool: the structured interview and the unstructured interview. In the structured interview the content and procedures were organised in advance. As a result, the sequence and wording of the questions were set by a schedule and the interviewer was not able to make many modifications. I met with a focus group at the start of my research in order to gain a large amount of rich data, in the form of categories, very quickly (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I agree with Stewart and Shamdsani (1990) that focus groups are useful at any point in research. The focus group was made up of four heads of department who I worked with very closely, and my aim was to draw out categories about their views on distributed leadership as opposed to making generalisations.

However, the unstructured interview has far greater flexibility and freedom associated with it and is an open situation. Here I did not present my interviewees with a list of questions but rather allowed them to set the agenda, the direction of the interview and the emerging topics. I kept an open mind, with my role being to listen and facilitate. The content, sequence and wording of the questions were all in the power of the interviewer but had to be planned carefully in advance.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) point to a number of guidelines and suggestions for the conduct of interviews and state that interviews should be an interpersonal matter where people are given time to think and silences should not be interrupted. There needs to be a summarising and crystallising of issues as well as building upon them. There must be consideration of the arrangement of furniture so as to avoid creating barriers as well as actually

managing the interview. And a clear introduction must be given, to fully explain how the interview will be conducted and check that the informed consent of the interviewee has been gained and that confidentiality and anonymity have been guaranteed.

I am especially aware that during the interview process the success of the interview relied upon the interaction between myself and the person being interviewed (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Between 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2012 I interviewed members of the senior management team and heads of department which included a Focus group.

**Table 5 Interviews Undertaken between October 2011- January 2012**

| <i>Type of fieldwork</i> | <i>Number of participants</i>  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Focus group              | 1 interview with 5 members of the Focus group  |
| Interviews               | 3 interviews with senior management team.<br>10 interviews with heads of department. |

I maximised the outcomes of the interviews by ensuring that the interviewees felt comfortable about participating, by interviewing each participant in familiar surroundings such as their own office or a classroom as well as providing each participant with a copy of the questions in advance for familiarisation purposes. I informed each participant that the interview would be digitally recorded, as well as gaining consent from each one through clear guidelines as to how I would transcribe the digitally recorded data, return it to them for

approval and then disseminate it. I then used aliases throughout my research documentation (BERA, 2004).

Some of the interviews were structured and some semi-structured with open-ended, non-judgemental questions, the aim being to encourage “unanticipated statements and stories to emerge” (Charmaz, 2006, p.26). The interview questions developed as Corbin and Strauss suggest from “concepts derived from the literature review” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.152).

I hope that the participants were pleased to be asked for an interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) and viewed it as an opportunity to participate in a professional discussion. Willingness to participate aligned with an overt approach to my research should have allowed “intensive interviews” to take place (Charmaz, 2006, p.25). Data from the transcripts was sent back to the participants for approval thus following ethical guidelines.

My expectation was that conducting the interviews in this way would have profound benefits for both me as interviewer as well as the participants. The interviews allowed me to facilitate more than a typical conversation that might take place in the staff room. I was able to be flexible in the way in which questions were asked, in that I was able to jump questions, return to an earlier point, ask for clarity on a point, change the topic or adjust the pace. I was able to use my insider knowledge of the school to further the discussion as well as show my appreciation to some participants by verbally encouraging them in their work. The interviews allowed participants to express in detail their views, thoughts and feelings that would not normally be shared in the staff room or

with colleagues. Through this process they were able to receive affirmation and understanding (Charmaz, 2006, p.26).

Questionnaires were also utilised as a research tool and were distributed to heads of department in the week beginning 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2011. Wilson and McLean (1994) state how questionnaires are a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information. They provide structured data whilst being able to be administered without the researcher being present and are fairly straightforward to analyse. There are negatives, though, in utilising questionnaires such as the time needed in order to develop, pilot and refine them and the possible limited scope of the data collected. Sellitz et al. (1976) highlight four key decision areas when constructing a questionnaire:

- Decisions about question content – for example, is the question content biased?
- Decisions about question wording – for example, could the question be misunderstood?
- Decisions about form of response to the question – for example, is the form of response easy, definite, uniform and adequate for purpose?
- Decisions about the place of the question in the sequence – for example, is the question in the correct psychological order?

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) make the point that the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, numerical and closed the questionnaire will need to be; whereas the smaller the size of sample, the less structured, more open and word-based the questionnaire will need to be. It is important to

remember also that the appearance of the questionnaire is very important. A questionnaire needs to appear easy, attractive and interesting rather than complicated, unclear and dull. A condensed layout is uninviting whereas a larger questionnaire with plenty of space for both questions and answers is far more encouraging (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). A key watchword seems to be “uncomplicated” as clarity of wording and a simple design are essential to success. Another key ingredient is that of including assurances of confidentiality and anonymity at the beginning of the questionnaire as well as providing a covering letter in order to highlight the aim of the research, explain its importance, assure confidentiality and encourage replies.

As categories emerged from analysing the interview and questionnaire data, school documents were targeted to enrich the substantive theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). These texts provided an “independent source of data” from first-hand materials (Charmaz, 2006, p.38). In order to explore specific categories relating to distributed leadership at the school, “elicited texts” through the use of questionnaires were given to heads of department (Charmaz, 2006, p.36). They were “guided by emerging gaps” in the theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.47). “Anonymous elicited texts can foster frank disclosures” that not all teachers might wish to make in an interview situation (Charmaz, 2006, p.36). Within the time boundaries of this research it was impossible to interview all heads of department. A number of heads of department indicated their wish to be interviewed and these questionnaires accommodated that. Further analysis of the interview data already collected informed the questions to be asked.

My own role in the school warrants some examination here at this point. As a deputy head in x school at the time the research was undertaken, my role could have had an impact on the responses I received in both the interview and questionnaire process. Thus there was a potential conflict of interest between my role as a member of senior management and as a researcher. This is where I needed to keep alert to the guidance from BERA (BERA, 2004). I also needed to ensure that, as Charmaz (2006) highlights, participants felt able to express their views in depth and in such a way as would not normally occur elsewhere in the school. Participants also needed to feel reassured, affirmed and understood by myself at all times in order to elicit openness.

I would hope that the participants taking part in my case study saw it as a positive opportunity to take part actively in a professional discussion where my senior management position played no part in the process. It was incumbent upon me to ensure that this approach was nurtured and maintained throughout my fieldwork and data collection. To this end I undertook overt research which demonstrated respect to all participants at all times, and was on a voluntary basis where informed consent could be withdrawn at any time.

I believed, on the basis of feedback mechanisms and anecdotal reporting, that I had the trust and respect of colleagues. My research as presented is anonymous, confidentiality has been assured, it does not reference names of participants and their consent to release of data has been gained (Mohr, 2001; BERA, 2004).

All research participants needed to have a full understanding of the research purposes and whether there were risks involved, and to be given a brief statement of the purpose of the research. They were also given a brief statement on the proposed methods of data generation as well as a form for them to sign to confirm their informed consent. Finally, since taking part they have been continually updated.

A further aspect of the above concerns is that part of my role as a deputy head was to line-manage various heads of department at x school. This involved a number of formal functions and roles such as holding exam analysis meetings where the external examination results were analysed to ascertain whether department and school targets were met or not. This therefore imposed a formal hierarchical layer between myself and the heads of department. It also imposed a level of power derived from my position as deputy head. Another key area is that of performance management where again my role as deputy head placed me in an elevated position of power over the heads of department. This scenario, where I was both researcher and deputy head in a pronounced line management role, could easily have impacted upon the responses of the participants. It was made very clear to all participants that my research had no impact upon our relationship at work, and in no way would my research or their responses influence our daily routine and practice. The two issues were not related in any way, shape or form. In short, an open and honest process was followed at all times, and I ensured that my position at x school would not influence the responses of the participants.

In my statement of research intent, I outlined what I would be researching and highlighted what the interviews would focus upon. This included the participants' perceptions and understanding of distributed leadership in theory and practice as well as how it can enhance school improvement. It focused upon the following areas:

- What were the heads of department and the senior management team's perspectives on distributed leadership?
- Did they see any discrepancies between distributed leadership in theory and practice?
- What ideas did they have for extending distributed leadership in the future?

I explicitly said that the interview transcript would be forwarded to the participants for their approval prior to data analysis and thus any inaccuracies could be corrected as they saw fit. I also offered each and every participant the opportunity to withdraw an individual response or indeed the entire interview after it had taken place. I also made clear that the transcript, data analysis and thesis would make no reference to the participants' identity and any statements they made would be disseminated through the research. All data would be held securely and confidentially in accordance with standard practice in educational research under the guidance of the University of Warwick ethics committee. I emphasised that this research was purely for my University of Warwick course and was totally separate to my normal working role at x school.

In terms of collection of data, I ensured that data was collected from normal processes already taking place at the school. Also, permission was sought to access data (documents) already at the school. All data was stored securely on a laptop and backed up to external storage. All raw data will be destroyed once the study has been completed.

In presenting the results of the research it has been imperative that anonymity and confidentiality have been assured. Statements by participants have been disseminated throughout the research, but alias names have been used instead of the participants' real names when adding statements. No reference has been made to a name or position of the participant. Finally, consent for the release of data has been gained from all participants for the final thesis (Mohr, 2001, p.9; BERA, 2004).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) highlight that the writing up of a case study is governed by the twin ideals of "fitness for purpose" and "fitness for audience" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.62). Six different forms of writing up a case study are put forward by Robson (2002) and it is the "narrative report" form that has best suited my case study (Robson, 2002, p.512-13). I have provided a prose account interspersed with relevant figures, tables, emergent issues, analysis and a conclusion. This in conjunction with the methodologies highlighted above has formed the basis of my Case Study on distributed leadership in my particular setting. I have gained some rich data which has enabled me to answer my research questions in detail and in a valid way.

Before moving on to the specifics of the questions I asked, a final summary treatment of the problem of self-censorship is required. Much methodology of the qualitative technique turns on eliciting the most accurate conclusions from an audience who, for various reasons, may err to self-censorship. Two extreme illustrations from the history of the qualitative interview method are illustrative of the two poles of the spectrum of (in)accuracy, between which I must strive towards the most productive *via media*. The first pole is that of “foreign-ness” and suspicion. In 1905 the academic brothers Sokolov were interviewing Russian peasants about folklore traditions in the Arkhangelsk Oblast; but, dressed in foreign clothes and amid a climate of hostility and introversion, the folklorists were mistaken for spies (either of the landlord, the Czar or the Japanese!) and were violently ejected from the village (Oinas and Soudakoff 1975, p.15).

In this extreme case we see the importance of setting interviewees at their ease. I have already elaborated on the significance of a friendly setting, a friendly face, and the general emphasis on sociability to aid, rather than as in the above case retard, the penetration of analysis. It is easy to see that, for a successful qualitative analysis, I must place myself in the position of the interviewee. It is not out of sycophancy that an interviewee is sometimes willing to be led by the questions of the interviewer, especially when the former holds his position, and indeed promotion, at the discretion of the latter. Rather it is the often natural wish to be helpful which can cause self-censorship. This is made more problematical by the possible ignorance of interviewees about the topic being discussed. As will become clear in my case

study, few have pondered the question of distributed leadership before; and those who have clearly have mixed appreciations of its definition and value. Consequently, this can provide answers which have not had time to mature in development, and can thus be confused or mutually contradictory. But this in itself is what is important. It is trying to elicit the frankest and most honest answers as possible which is essential. It is the seam of *willingness* on the part of interviewees to explain their views which I needed to tap in my interviews.

This is where the second pole and example comes in: miscomprehension and rigidity of questioning. 67 years after the American Revolution had concluded, an exasperated journalist in Massachusetts kept barraging questions at an octogenarian former combatant about his motivation for fighting in the war. Each time the interviewer asked questions *from his own expectations* about why the man had fought, the interviewee became increasingly confused until the journalist had run through all of his pre-prepared questions and had taken no answers which satisfied his curiosity (Tindall and Shi, 1993).

In this case it was not that the interviewee was unwilling to answer questions, it was that the wrong questions were being asked. A refusal to ask questions with flexibility, and to pursue lines of enquiry which have been dismissed as irrelevant, is the second pole of bad qualitative method. This has already been elaborated above at some length; but the point which needs finally emphasising here is that, in my case, I was dealing with a topic which many interviewees had not considered at great length prior to their familiarisation with the questions immediately before the interview.

As such, spontaneity of questioning and an openness to pursue their individual and relative perspectives, within the boundaries of the set questions I was working in, was essential to understanding my two objectives: of describing what they think, and why they do. As such, my position of departure had to be one of necessarily low expectations – not out of condescension, but because I sought a synchronic understanding, not to criticise.

The questions themselves were crafted specifically in line with these basic dictums of research. They fell largely into two groups: those dealing with theory and those dealing with the situation on the ground. The theoretical ones were those which specifically dealt with the nature of being a head of department and a member of the senior management, what those roles entail and particularly the inter-relation (or not) of leadership and management, with flexibility to explore the nuance of that relationship. I anticipated that this would be even more revealing in the contextual questions where the culture of management and leadership, its boundaries, flaws, virtues and possibilities for extension, could be given the fullest possible treatment. I expected the question relating to the conduciveness of the culture and structure of the school to the implementation of distributed leadership to be the most illuminating on this point, and if the answers showed a large spectrum of interpretation of either positives or negatives then this would form the crux of my analysis. This is of course where the qualitative questions would provide the depth, as well as the tractability, to give the gradations of response fullest form and make my analysis as credible as possible. The quantitative

questions would then allow a visual representation of those views, which, whilst they sacrifice nuance, underline general trends of comments.

The focus group was made up of five heads of department: three male and two female. This provided a range of gender, age and experience as well as a representative from a small, medium and large-sized department. The aim here was to elicit a range of responses and experiences from a variety of perspectives on the issue of distributed leadership. Open and explicit prompts were used in order to include an understanding of the term distributed leadership, to ascertain what experience of it the participants had, to examine the perception and reality of distributed leadership at x school, to see whether distributed leadership can raise or contribute to school improvement and to see what discrepancies exist around distributed leadership at x school.

The interviews themselves were then semi-structured and involved a sample of ten heads of department and three members of the senior management team, again providing a range of age, gender, experience and so on. I asked the heads of department the following questions:

1. What do you understand by the term distributed leadership? (DL or delegation?)
2. Do you feel you have autonomy/freedom as a leader? (How? Why not?)
3. Do you feel you have ownership of leadership? (How? Why? Why not?)
4. Do you see yourself as a leader or manager or both?
5. What benefits could you see to enhancing your distributed leadership role for the wider gain?

6. Are there links between distributed leadership and school improvement?  
(How? Why?)
7. Have you any ideas as to how distributed leadership could be enhanced so as to raise school improvement?

I asked the senior management team the following questions:

1. What do you understand by the term distributed leadership? (DL or delegation?)
2. What importance do you attach to distributed leadership?
3. How far do you employ distributed leadership with your HOD link? (How? Why?)
4. Do we have the capacity for enhancing distributed leadership? (How?)
5. Can you see any discrepancies with distributed leadership across the HODs?
6. Do you see a divide between a leader and a manager?
7. What perception does the Head Teacher have of distributed leadership across senior management team and HODs?
8. Do the SMT believe they get distributed leadership from the head and do they then encourage distributed leadership to their HODs?

The questionnaire to all heads of department consisted of questions having a scale of responses from 1 to 5 where: 1 = totally agree; 2 = partially agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = partially disagree; 5 = totally disagree. The questions were as follows:

1. Senior management team encourage leadership in my role as HOD

2. Leadership and management are different things
3. I understand the difference between leadership and management
4. I see my role as HOD mainly as a managerial one
5. I see my role as HOD mainly as a leadership one
6. I see my role as HOD as evenly balancing both leadership and managerial roles
7. The culture of the school is conducive to promoting leadership at HOD level
8. Leadership is a positive thing at HOD level
9. Leadership at HOD level can lead to school improvement
10. Developing leadership at HOD level will enhance school improvement
11. Leadership at HOD level provides ownership of school aims
12. Are you familiar with the current and ongoing educational debate about distributed leadership? Yes/No (Please delete as appropriate). If Yes, what do you understand by the term distributed leadership?

**Table 6 Types of fieldwork undertaken**

| <i>Type of fieldwork</i>                                       | <i>Number of participants</i> |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Focus group Interview  | 5 members of the Focus group  |
| Questionnaires to heads of department                          | 15 (21 distributed )          |
| Interviews with senior management team and heads of department | 13                            |

During the course of my fieldwork I kept a research diary which supplied some depth and contextual framing as well as illustrating aspects of distributed leadership in x school. For reasons of space, entries are summarised rather than given in full. For example:

- At a number of head of department meetings between 2011 and 2012 (there were two head of department meetings each term – September, November, January, March, May and June) certain heads of department viewed the actions of some members of the senior management team as delegation and no more. They did not view themselves as being in possession of a leadership role as a direct consequence of the actions of senior management.
- I noted on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2011 that the real power in x school was not shared widely amongst the middle leaders – it was held by the senior management. Key decisions such as those relating to curriculum development were taken by the deputy head who was responsible for the curriculum, and a degree of lip service was paid to the heads of department at meetings where such topics were discussed, but the views of the heads of department were not effectively taken into account as the decisions had already been made.
- I noted on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2011, communication between the senior management and the middle leaders was often poor and ineffective. Middle leaders believed that their views did not really count and that they were not allowed to be a part of the decision-making process. As a consequence, the middle leaders felt disenfranchised and uninvolved

when it came to the big issues surrounding school improvement, vision and future plans.

- As a result of poor communication I noted on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2012 that, to an extent at least, trust had been eroded amongst the middle leaders. There was a strong sense of *fait accompli* when it came to decision-making and future planning.
- I noticed on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012 that school improvement was somewhat hindered by the actions of the senior management. This was because, if the middle leaders had been empowered and trusted to effectively lead on key issues such as curriculum planning, then the benefits to x school would be immense. The middle leaders genuinely felt that they were being “done to” and not “doing” themselves. This engendered a sense of disillusionment and frustration as they felt that they had much more to offer and contribute to make x school a better place – in the broadest sense.
- Body language in head of department meetings (for example on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012) and staff briefings was telling: heads remained low, shoulders hunched and eyes rolled as members of the senior management spoke and made announcements. It was clear to me that not everyone felt as if they were allowed to lead their team as they desired and that the road to school improvement was very prescriptive with the power resting with the few and communication being poor.

It became very clear to me that distributed leadership had a very different perspective and impact depending on whether one was a middle or senior

leader in x school. I made a note to myself that if I secured a headship and ran my own school then this would be something that needed to be different. Communication had to be clear – this is what we are doing, this is how we are going to do it and this is why we are doing it. Middle leaders deserved to be respected and included in decision-making processes, about the shape of the curriculum for example. Middle leaders are a key component in any school structure and their leadership in the broadest sense is crucial if a school is to improve in terms of academic progress and attainment. In short, middle leaders needed to be trusted by the senior management if a school I would lead was going to be successful. Finally, the senior management had to understand the benefits afforded by distributed leadership and not simply view it as a form of delegation and control.

My role in the case study as researcher fuelled my interest in distributed leadership as referred to in Chapter 1. I could clearly see how key elements of distributed leadership were lacking in x school such as trust and communication. I could see how, if I was the headteacher, I would operationalise distributed leadership to good effect in order to have a positive impact upon school improvement as well as to empower middle leaders to lead on a whole school basis. I have found that if middle leaders feel that they are valued and trusted then they will buy into the vision far more readily. I saw a certain amount of dissatisfaction amongst the middle leaders at x school as well as distributed leadership being underemployed and underutilised by senior managers. This had a negative impact upon school improvement. I will refer back to this in more detail in Chapter 6.

I recognise that in case study research there is the criticism that sample sizes can be small. I also recognise that additional interviews or observations may add to the research data (Cohen et al, 2003). Nevertheless, the interviews collected, together with the questionnaire responses and incidents noted in my research diary, were representative of the case study approach, in which studies are focused upon single cases (Hayes, 2006) and in which no generalisations are claimed. Thus I carried out a mixed-methods study, but I note that the survey was small-scale.

In terms of a critical reflection on how the process went I would say that the whole process overall was very positive. By adopting a qualitative methodology, my fieldwork was able to be more flexible in approach. I did gain greater spontaneity and have a large amount of interaction between myself and the participants. I asked, for the large part, open-ended questions in a semi-structured format and this allowed the participants to respond in their own words, which provided me with some complex and detailed responses as opposed to simple affirmatives or negatives. This is in direct contrast to quantitative approaches (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2011). I found that the qualitative approach I adopted effectively enabled me to gather information about the human side of the issue I was researching and allowed me an insight into the beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of the different participants (Thomas, 2011; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

I was very careful at all times to ensure that my position at x school did not influence the responses of the participants. I maintained a very clear ethical

stance throughout the process as well as maintaining a professional position at all times (BERA, 2004). There was never any issue related to my position or role as a member of the senior management team and as researcher. One difficulty I did encounter was trying to meet my interview deadlines as well as all my responsibilities as a deputy head; however, my colleagues were very supportive of my research. If I was to repeat this process, I would adopt the same format and approach but perhaps attempt to give myself more time in the build-up to the interview schedule.

## Chapter 4 – Data and Results

In total 15 heads of department responded to a specific questionnaire (see appendix 2) which formed the quantitative element of my investigation. I have presented this data where appropriate in both graphs and tables to demonstrate trends in the responses received. A brief note below summarises the way in which the questionnaires operated. Each member of staff consulted was given the questionnaire to consider in their own time and then return to me, so as to avoid the pressure or bias that might otherwise occur.

I spent time refining the questionnaire to create questions which were as fixed and easy to understand as possible. In doing so I endeavoured to avoid conceptual pitfalls: for example, providing a first question which, if answered negatively, would leave subsequent questions redundant. An example of this would be “Do you understand the concept of distributed leadership?” followed by questions like “What interests you most about it?” and/or “How would you refine it?” A respondent who initially answered that they did not understand the concept would be unable to answer the following questions, and so the data as a whole would not be substantive. To make the questionnaire as accessible and unthreatening as possible I tried to keep the presentation simple, and also created a cover letter emphasising the academic nature of the research as well as the guarantee of confidentiality which, I hoped, would help put respondents at their ease and ultimately produce the best data.

This chapter will only present trends; the next will provide greater breadth and depth to the responses received. The trends we are most interested in are

those relating to mutual consensus or mutual contradiction regarding the theorising about the concepts associated with distributed leadership – leadership, management, and the ownership they beget – and the real application of those concepts when manifested in the school. A secondary trend worth considering will be the extent to which the heads of department were aware of distributed leadership as a holistic concept and how far this awareness produced positive or negative feedback to the questions. If many people were aware of distributed leadership, then it is a fair inference that it is a well-entrenched doctrine in the school management system; if few people were aware of it, or if ideas about it were mutually contradictory, then we can infer that it is an alien concept, or at least badly articulated by the senior management. Equally, if the heads of department were self-consciously aware of the concept and gave positive feedback to the questions then we may infer that, however large or small a group understand distributed leadership, that understanding produced a favourable response to it. This can then be related back to the authoritative literature, and whether the fieldwork and the theory support each other. To begin with let us turn to the theoretical questions.

Heads of department largely understood that leadership and management were different concepts, entailing different responsibilities. 13 of the 15 heads of department questioned agreed this.

**Table 7 Middle Leaders' Questionnaire Responses**

| Question  | Responses  |
|---|--|
| Are leadership and management different things?                     | 9 totally agreed<br>4 partially agreed<br>1 partially disagreed<br>1 totally disagreed                                   |
| Do you understand the difference between leadership and management? | 8 totally agreed<br>6 partially agreed<br>1 partially disagreed  |
| Should HODs have a leadership role?                                 | 14 totally agreed<br>1 partially agreed  |
| Do you see your role as HOD mainly as a managerial one?             | 2 totally agreed<br>4 partially agreed<br>5 neither agreed nor disagreed<br>1 partially disagreed<br>3 totally disagreed |
| Do you see your role as HOD mainly as a leadership one?             | 2 totally agreed<br>3 partially agreed   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>3 neither agreed nor disagreed</p> <p>4 partially disagreed</p> <p>3 totally disagreed</p>                        |
| <p>Do you see your role as evenly balancing leadership and management roles?</p>    | <p>7 totally agreed</p> <p>5 partially agreed</p> <p>2 neither agreed nor disagreed</p> <p>1 totally disagreed</p>   |
| <p>Does leadership at HOD level provide ownership of school aims?</p>               | <p>9 totally agreed</p> <p>3 partially agreed</p> <p>1 neither agreed nor disagreed</p> <p>2 partially disagreed</p> |
| <p>Do the SMT encourage leadership in your role as HOD?</p>                         | <p>5 totally agreed</p> <p>6 partially agreed</p> <p>4 neither agreed nor disagreed</p>                              |
| <p>Is the culture of the school conducive to promoting leadership at HOD level?</p> | <p>1 totally agreed</p> <p>6 partially agreed</p> <p>2 neither agreed nor disagreed</p>                              |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | 6 partially disagreed   |
| Does leadership at HOD level enhance school improvement?            | 13 totally agreed<br>1 partially agreed<br>1 neither agreed nor disagreed |
| Does developing leadership at HOD level enhance school improvement? | 10 totally agreed<br>4 partially agreed<br>1 neither agreed nor disagreed |

14 of the 15 heads of department questioned also maintained that they understood the difference between leadership and management.

There was equally very strong unanimity in the belief that heads of department should have a leadership role in the school beyond the department, with a 100% positive response, with all but one being adamant.

There were, however, degrees of contradiction in the ways heads of department conceived of themselves primarily as managers or leaders or an equal balance of the two. Six of the heads of department questioned agreed that they were primarily managers, with four disagreeing and five sitting on the fence.

Five of the heads of department thought they were primarily leaders, with seven disagreeing and three undecided. Yet 12 heads of department maintained they were an equal mix of both, with one dissenting and two undecided. Clearly as the 15 heads of department went through the questionnaire, a sizeable majority changed their minds. Out of the 15, 12 maintained they were a balance of leader and manager and 11 also maintained that either leadership or management dominated the other.

This is a good example of why quantitative research alone would have been an inappropriate methodology for this exercise as it could produce results which by themselves prove misleading. The apparent contradictions of the responses to the conceptual questions about the nature of the role of head of department as manager or as leader as standalone data cannot meaningfully point to the balance between the concepts in the role in the way that the qualitative data did. The qualitative data, as the interviews show in the next chapter, was much more illuminating on the mixed constituency of the role of head of department. That data shows a clear consensus that, by degrees, heads of department are both leaders and managers, whilst the quantitative data interpreted by itself only shows confusion. Precisely because of this, considering that all of the heads of department interviewed maintained that they were both leaders and managers in some form or another, the eventual cumulative judgement of the questionnaires is striking.

## **Ownership of School Aims**

The questionnaires supported the interviews presenting the idea that leadership at head of department level provides a sense of ownership of school aims. 12 heads of department agreed with this, nine of those agreeing strongly.

This sense of professional and personal investment in the school through taking part in the leadership of school improvement was another recurring theme for heads of department. It also emphasises that, on most points of issue, the quantitative and qualitative elements of my analysis triangulate to produce conclusions of mutual agreement. The interviews and the questionnaires, on the whole, produced a substantive conviction about the potential benefits of distributed leadership, and its current absence.

So much for the theory; what about the realities in the case study school? The vast majority agreed that the senior management team encouraged leadership in their roles as heads of department, with no dissenters and only three undecided.

This fitted in well with the interviews, since the majority of those interviewed felt that, as heads of department, they were left room for leadership of the departmental curriculum, although few felt they encouraged leadership of wider school improvement. From the point of view of the senior management team they also thought that, on the whole, they were encouraging leadership in the roles of the heads of department.

Perhaps the most interesting answer was also the most divisive. Seven people agreed and six people disagreed with the statement that the culture of the school was conducive to promoting leadership at head of department level. This was very largely elaborated on in the interviews and was equally divisive, with if anything more heads of department seeing negatives in the culture of the school. There was, however, great unanimity about the impact heads of department could have on the school's improvement plan. 14 people answered this question positively, 13 of them strongly.

Perhaps 14 also maintained that developing the existing improvement plan would enhance it even more.

It should be noted that there was a relationship between knowledge of the debate surrounding distributed leadership and the positive feedback given on the questionnaires. The three heads of department who knew something of this debate gave only one negative answer between them, and that was to the nature of the role of head of department.

## Focus Group Interview

**Table 8: Profile and length of service of the members of the focus group**

| <i>Interviewee Number</i> | <i>Job Title</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Length of Service (at x school )</i> |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------------|---|
| 1                         | Middle leader    | Male          | 3 years                                 |
| 2                         | Middle leader    | Female        | 4 years                                 |
| 3                         | Middle leader    | Male          | 24 years                                |
| 4                         | Middle leader    | Male          | 4 years                                 |
| 5                         | Middle leader    | Female        | 14 years                                |

In terms of the focus group interview it was very clear that there were mixed levels of understanding with regard to what distributed leadership was in theory and in practice at the case study school. Indeed, there were at least two members of the group who had not heard of it at all but believed it to revolve around an idea of contributing in some way to the school vision and direction rather than simply being led.

The group believed that distributed leadership should incorporate devolving power to middle management and other staff rather than simply delegating jobs. Rather than a hierarchy where the vision and leadership ideas for the school come from the top, these should be filtered through middle management; as a result, everyone takes ownership of the idea of what leadership should be, and it is then filtered down into the departments at a staff level. This necessitates enhanced and clear communication between staff, as well as being linked to an individual's professional development.

They felt that, in theory, distributed leadership had the capability to enhance broader school improvement in a positive way, particularly the idea of it contributing to the overall vision and direction of the school rather than staff simply being led. In order for this to happen it would have to be “sold” and presented to staff in the right way, so that staff genuinely believe that they have a meaningful voice in the process and key visionary decisions. Also, as well as everyone understanding what the initial aim or target is, they have to believe that they are working towards a common goal.

### **Understanding**

The five members of the focus group questioned were asked what they thought about and understood by the term distributed leadership, garnering the following responses:

Focus group member No 1 replied: “My understanding of distributed leadership was that you use middle management, so rather than having a hierarchy where it’s just a vision for the school and ideas about leadership just come from the top level it’s, if you like, filtered through middle management as well so that everyone is taking ownership of the idea of what leadership should be and we then filter that through down into the departments at a staff level.”

Focus group member No 2 stated: “I must admit that until we started our discussion I hadn’t heard of it; but when you sort of gave me the term, the

ideas that came to mind were very much what Mary put forward. The idea of contributing somehow to the vision and direction rather than simply being led.

“Presumably within that is the idea that each Department’s vision plays a part within the bigger or whole thing. It’s that as opposed to being delegated which would basically mean each department could go off and do what they liked. I would have thought that was different to distributed leadership.”

### **Delegation**

When asked if there was a difference between distributed leadership and just pure delegation focus group member No 1 said: “Distribution sounds more forceful, doesn’t it? You have the vision as the senior management team and then there’s an expectation that people in the middle will come on board and do it in a certain way maybe.”

Focus group member No 2 suggested that: “I think it can only work if everybody understands what the initial aim or target is, so everybody’s got to understand that we’re working towards a common goal.

“I think there might be a danger that people feel strait-jacketed, that their aims must be only within the parameters of the overall vision. I think that would actually be a bad thing. I would seem to think of that as delegation, in the sense that goals have been set: right, so these are our goals, and I’m delegating to you the responsibility to achieve the goals – but I’ve decided what the goals are.

“It will only work if you’re enthusiastic about it. If you’re in the middle and you’re enthusiastic and you share the... if it allows the bottom to feed up, or the middle to feed up... if you have a voice, the actual definition of the vision itself... a form of symbiotic relationship.

“I think at the crux of it is the whole nature of the communication process and how that works and how that goes on.”

When asked to expand further they went on to suggest: “Well, for example, I’ll go back to the point I made last time about target setting. So there was a goal, if you like, we were all told we’d got to buy into, which we did; but I don’t think there was a forum in which we could talk about the value of target setting, when we should target set, why we’re doing it, whether it really does have a function; and I don’t think people really necessarily bought into it in the way that perhaps SMT might have wanted them to. So that would be for me an example about the way in which perhaps it wasn’t communicated as well as it could have been.”

I then proceeded to ask if the school could do better in terms of using our leaders, the middle managers, more effectively.

Focus group member No 3 suggested: “Perhaps having a meeting and discussing it with staff and making them feel more involved before actually taking a decision anyway, so that people have at least put their views forward and everyone felt that they’d had a chance to say whether they thought it was a good idea or not before it then actually went through.

“The target setting is like a hurdle to get over, isn’t it, and then you can get on with the rest of the year.”

Another member, focus group member No 4, said: “To a lot of points you just pay lip service to it, don’t you; and it’s interesting, surprisingly interesting, how little difference there is between a Physics lesson and a History lesson, in my experience; so it’s quite interesting, but is that moving the school forward at all – I don’t think so.”

“I find it useful, I think, in terms of the reports and looking at the target you’ve set, particularly for Year 10 MIDYIS target setting, especially now that we’ve gone on to an end of term as I don’t think that everybody has bought into that.”

“I thought that was a really interesting example because, in a sense, the school did try to get the heads of department on board. It was discussed at head of department level quite some time ago. Well, was it discussed or was it presented and then there was a bit of discussion about it?”

“There was no distribution there. It was – this is broadly speaking what we want to do, what do you think about it, OK that’s interesting, this is what we’re going to do.”

“You see my situation with target setting, the first mention of it came up as a result of our departmental review where one of the things that was mentioned was, how do kids know that the feedback they get is in relation to any baseline

that we set by year group, and that got me thinking about it. I took on the desire from on high, as it were, and I'm quite keen on doing that sort of thing and that was shared with the department."

"But it has got to be a common goal, hasn't it, and I think the kids have got to take ownership of it as well, because I think even some of the children just go 'oh well, you know'. If you're going to do something like that there's got to be an absolute sort of common ownership so we all know the reason why we're doing it."

### **Theory and Practice in x school**

"To what extent do we all think distributed leadership's possible in that sense? The shape of our organisation, it's quite unusual isn't it, we've got a little peak and then very quickly we've got a very wide second tier with all the heads of department. So if you're going to say that actually you need to get all of that quite wide second tier on board, that's a major ask, isn't it?"

"Can I just ask, Simon, is distributed leadership something that has taken place before primarily in the domain of the state sector?"

This question highlights the lack of development of distributed leadership within the Independent sector and the lack of understanding amongst the focus group at x school about the concept of distributed leadership.

An interesting point was made by another member of the group, focus group member No 5, who asked: "How does it fit in with the idea that departments are, in so many ways, self-contained units; and, while there are obviously connections in terms of how might a child fulfil their GCSE potential, certainly at that sort of level in a subject like History you're looking at something specific, 'how do we answer question 3b'; and while you can distribute the leadership in the sense of taking responsibility for your own subject, I just think we are all so... not narrow, but so very specifically focused as middle managers that I wonder how much sharing there can be in that sense.

"I think that will identify problems with whatever you're trying to implement as well because different people see things in completely different ways.

"I think there's also a danger that as a Department you have your aims and objectives and you then sort of try to tailor them to one of the school's goals just to tick a box. 'Oh yes, I've got a departmental goal that fits that bit of the school vision'; rather than thinking either 'What is the school vision, how does that impact on us?' or 'Well this is where we see the department going, I believe broadly it is in the same direction ". I think sometimes it can be a bit artificial... trying to fit your departmental objectives to the school one can be a bit artificial. Not necessarily a bad thing, but artificial in terms of a paper exercise."

## Power

Focus group member No 1 made the following points: “Can I throw a couple of ideas in about practicalities? One thing that came to mind when talking about heads of departments distributed leadership in the sense of team in my department, one of the interesting structural issues that we face is that people’s remuneration certainly, status to some degree, is sort of defined in a very mechanical way, isn’t it? You can have a second in department or a Key Stage 3 coordinator or something like that, and that seems to be very much ingrained in the culture, so if you’re going to say I want to empower my guys to sort of take control they will say... above my pay scale. They’ll say, ‘Are you going to give me a point for that, are you going to give me a title for that?’

“So I don’t know if that’s an issue.”

A response to that was: “It is an issue actually. I think it’s more of an issue than... so for example people aren’t going to want to take on leadership of something because they will want remuneration. And if that’s the case it will be the department. Obviously in our department we do a lot of things but we... I suppose I share. If I do something like an Olympiad then I might want other people to do things, there are other competitions. Who is going to do that? Do I do it all because I’m head of department and it’s on my allowance? But it’s nice then to be able to devolve that to members of the department.”

To which focus group member No 2 responded: “It could be easier to do the make-up of your department. I mean, I’ve got people that want to do things for

career development so rather than me feeling a particular responsibility to do it as head of department, people want to do this kind of thing; but that's probably down to the shape of my department as much as anything.

"In my department people would find it difficult possibly to take on more because they've got other responsibilities outside of the department so I do find that sometimes I end up doing some things that perhaps might have been given out a bit more widely in other areas."

### **Leadership and Management**

The following point was then made by focus group member No 3: "That was the other point I was going to raise; the second one was, I don't know what the rest of you think, but to me leadership requires space and time: and one of the things that you asked in the questionnaire was, what was the difference between leadership and management? Management is, you've got a number of tasks that you have to get done and you've got to manage the task to make sure everything's met and that's sort of immediate and constant, whereas leadership is about vision and to me that actually requires the space and time to think and develop and be creative and all the rest of it, so you transfer that back to our sort of context as heads of department, do we have the time and the space?"

"But it is the sense of needing the space for the management, let alone the teaching, marking, blah, blah, blah. Space for the management, getting this done, getting that done, to actually see over the horizon."

“And actually, Simon, just coming back to that Year 10 target setting. To do that effectively and for everybody to really buy in to it you need time to do it properly; and I guarantee there will be lots of people, and you know people, who won’t have sat down with the kids and had a dialogue, which is what SMT hoped for but that won’t have happened.”

“But you know, this whole idea of doing this effectively – you’ve got to give people the time to do it.”

### **Appraisal and Professional Development**

The group then discussed the notion of appraisal and professional development and whether x school had a system in place that had any connection to distributed leadership.

Focus group member No 1 stated: “I think it’s quite a poor appraisal system, to be frank. I think this whole idea of just having, you’ve got to have three targets, I think people have become quite cynical and blasé about it and say, ooh look I’ve got three targets, let’s just put this down. I don’t think there’s a... It strikes me that, I’d like a more formal appraisal system so people feel what they’re doing, it’s not just me saying, look that’s really good, well done. That that’s seen at a senior management level so that people then have an opportunity not just to talk to me about their concerns or whatever, but to talk to senior managers as well so that there is much more a sense of being valued and something driving something forward, you know in terms of professional development.”

Focus group member No 2 believed that: “It feels very long in the tooth to me, having done it several times; and perhaps it would be better done at the end of the school year when things quieten down in the summer because you’ve had a year to reflect and I’m not necessarily at my most thoughtful in September about, you know, where you see you’ve been and where things haven’t quite worked out.”

“You raise the point about professional development, I would agree with that. I think leadership is something you can train people in, it’s not something that you have got or haven’t got. There’s a whole set of skills and a set way of thinking and if an institution was going to take distributed leadership seriously then I think they’d have to take that seriously. You’d have to look at your heads of department and you’d have to ask what sort of support I could give them to develop their leadership skills.”

“And that isn’t in place, there isn’t any of that.”

Focus group member No 3 stated: “I think it’s got a slightly negative image amongst some staff because of people who are expected to find new things to put on their appraisal rather than things... because anything they would be doing anyway isn’t approved of, or is certainly frowned upon as being a target, which I find, from my perspective, that’s not what I’m looking at. If I’m looking at someone like Francis, then developing a larger number of high quality personal studies would be something he would be doing anyway, but I would put that as a target because I think that is good for him, good for the school and good for the department.”

“So I think some people feel, oh God, target setting, I’ve got to think of something else that will fill up my spare time as well as my teaching and marking and all that kind of stuff. I think that can have a negative impact, so if it was more tied in to the development rather than just, well, add this on as well as a bolt on, I think that would be good for it and I think that might be more distributive if we’re coming back to distributed leadership.”

### **Enhancement of school improvement**

I then summed up the meeting of the focus group by taking the loose definition of distributed leadership as involving better communication, not just delegation but devolving and developing, linking to professional development for middle managers at x school. I then asked them if they thought that distributed leadership could actually enhance school improvement.

Focus group member No 1 believed: “In theory, yes. It has to be sold right and presented right... It’s about stakeholdership.”

“And not about, we’re going to make you work harder so that we feel better and look better, but you can’t look at that as head of department. Make your department work harder so the department or the head of department looks better and I think there might be a danger that it would look like that. We’re giving you all this responsibility...”

Focus group member No 2 stated: “To me that’s the absolute core because heads of department will believe it if they genuinely believe it, and they will

genuinely believe it if they feel as if they are genuinely given a meaningful voice in the key visionary decisions. If it's a sort of lip service which is paid and then, you know, it ends up being delegated, then the heads of departments... it's more or less the same as it was before and that will filter down I suspect."

Another member of the group, focus group member No 3, felt that: "The systems we have to implement, they have to themselves evolve, like the appraisal system. It can't just stay as it is forever can it? It's got to evolve."

"It can't just be seen as a way for the top to be getting all the kudos because of the work of the middle and the bottom. It's got to be seen as a shared enterprise from all levels. It's a cultural shift."

This data provided rich information as I progressed to the interview schedule of both heads of department and the senior management team.

## Senior Management Team Interview

**Table 9: Profile and length of service: senior management team**

| <i>Interviewee Number</i> | <i>Job Title</i>      | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Length of Service (at x school )</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|---|
| 1                         | head                  | Male          | 2 years                                 |
| 2                         | deputy<br>headteacher | Female        | 3 years                                 |
| 3                         | deputy<br>headteacher | Male          | 16 months                               |

The interviews showed that the senior management team shared a mixed level of understanding about the concept of distributed leadership. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, each interview being recorded and subsequently transcribed personally by me. Each of the three members of senior management interviewed was asked the same set of questions:

- “What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?”
- “What importance do you attach to distributed leadership?”
- “How far do you employ distributed leadership with your HOD link? (How/Why?)”
- “Do we have the capacity for enhancing distributed leadership?”
- “Can you see any discrepancies with distributed leadership across the HODs?”
- “Do you see a divide between a leader and a manager?”

- “What perception does the HM have of distributed leadership across SMT and HoDs?”

## **Delegation**

Each member of the SMT believed that there was an element of delegation which should be attributed to distributed leadership. SMT No 1 believed that distributed leadership means that there are tiers of leadership so that things are delegated down the tier structure. This would not be like a pyramid, “more like a flat leadership structure so that there is not quite so much hierarchy”. There would probably be as much, if not more, delegation than there might have been in a true hierarchical system, because if you are distributing leadership you are saying “you’ve got responsibility for that, get on with it” to a certain extent.

SMT No 2 saw distributed leadership as a way in which anybody who was in a leadership or management position would provide guidance, provide instruction for those at the same level and those below them, so that those people would understand their role in leading whatever their aspect or involvement in the school was. Therefore, rather than just trying to have a top-down approach where leadership only came from one or a few people, you would be trying to get all staff to have shared ownership and they would become leaders in their own right.

The final member of the group, SMT No 3, felt that distributed leadership was “the ability for people to exhibit leadership without the direct instruction from

the Head to do so.” Staff are taking a little bit of initiative whilst bearing in mind the whole school ethos and having an awareness of the direction that the school should be going in, but within that using their own initiative to exhibit leadership themselves. Distributed leadership is more difficult than direct delegation because you are not in control of it. It is more difficult to implement, more difficult for a school leader to be aware of and to shape.

When questioned about the importance that they, the SMT, attach to distributed leadership there was a very positive response and all felt that it was a significant factor in running an effective and efficient school today.

### **Empowering Leadership vs Solo Leadership**

SMT No 1 felt that it was very important because they believed that an organisation works better with leadership that is not based around one or two people holding all the strings, but by allowing people the freedom to do their bit. They strongly believed that any big organisation should empower leaders to lead because one person cannot keep hold of it all. Equally, the leaders should be permitted to make their own mistakes and take responsibility for them. They believed that: “You have to give them the authority to do it, to make decisions, take risks and stand by them. It doesn’t mean that you aren’t there to support if you’re a leader of a leader, but you’ve got to not interfere. It’s not a question of giving them the autonomy and then taking it back as soon as they do something that you don’t like. That’s not distributed leadership, that’s still doing the leading.”

SMT No 2 also attached huge importance to distributed leadership. They were aware that: “It has become a very popular philosophy within leadership models, moving away from the stereotypical grand leader who is in control of everything.” Having staff who, as a group, are all trying to be more independent in their approach and understanding and use their initiative to achieve the goals of the school can only be a good thing.

SMT No 3 also saw the relevance of distributed leadership in education today. They stated: “The bigger the organisation, I think, the more important distributed leadership is. It is more difficult to put into place, but there is no reason why you can’t directly delegate so many tasks because you cannot supervise all of the people doing them. Give people a role and hope that they carry out the role, rather than giving them tasks to carry out.” They felt that it was a prerequisite for a successful school and didn’t see how a large school could succeed without it or have a significant amount of success in a short time without it. Ultimately, it is essential to school improvement.

### **Employment of Direct Leadership**

The third question asked how far each member of SMT employed distributed leadership with their HOD link. Having already agreed the importance of distributed leadership, it was clear that the three respondents used it very differently with varying levels of success.

SMT No 1 felt lucky because most of the heads of department were good at their jobs and therefore very able to get on with things. Problems only arose in

the departments where team members lacked leadership skills and qualities and therefore leadership could not be distributed. Although this interviewee was aware of the importance of distributed leadership, they weren't fully confident in their own ability to use it and stated: "I don't think I'm very good at distributed leadership to a certain extent. I like to have my fingers in the pie still. I think it helps when you have leaders who tell you what they are doing and keep you informed."

SMT No 2 felt that it was a work in progress. They believed that: "Teachers are naturally quite averse to feeling like they are dumping on other people, and even though distributed leadership is not about delegation and passing things down it's still something which needs to be addressed very carefully. I feel that with the heads of year, for instance, there will be various aspects where we will look to share the leadership, or distribute the leadership, in terms of trying to get them to bring their year group forward in a particular way, e.g. uniform. In the past, I think, heads of year have tended to assume SMT should just tell everybody to do it and what we are trying to do is make sure that the heads of year understand that they can also be pushing things forward."

Although SMT No 3 had shown how keen they were on distributed leadership, they felt that it was tricky to employ in their situation at the time of interview. "It's a complex one because people have been looking towards me more to provide the things that we have talked about before, direction so that they know how to implement their decisions, the leadership within the envelope, so I think they have been relying on me to give them, to show leadership rather

than take the initiative.” This interviewee felt that, with regards to the heads of department, their leadership in terms of the curriculum was strong and they did provide the right direction; when it came to broader aspects of school management such as HR, resource acquisitions and budgets they struggled more. They didn’t try as much distributed leadership and tended to delegate upwards on things they found difficult or outside their comfort zone. In terms of moving things forward, “I think they want to know how it’s done and I’ve found the best way of doing that initially is to show them how to do it and talk people through a particular task or let them see me do it and then the next time they will just feel that little bit more comfortable doing it themselves.”

### **Enhancing Direct Leadership**

Question 4 asked whether the SMT had the capacity for enhancing distributed leadership and how it could be done. All three respondents agreed that yes, they/the school could do this, but that there was much room for improvement in terms of staff taking the school’s vision forward. In the staffroom there was a need for management of change and for the staff to understand leadership a lot better.

SMT No 1 said they would like to think that distributed leadership could be enhanced. However, within the school at that time they did not feel that there was the capability among the staff to pull it off. They felt: “The personnel are there who could do it, I’m certain, but I think there is a need for understanding what leadership is about and there are still too many managers.”

SMT No 2 certainly believed that the personnel and characters existed within the school to take this forward, but was more dubious about whether these staff were actually willing to get stuck in. They stated: “If you speak to most members of staff here the one thing that they would say is that they just don’t have enough time, regardless of what level they are at... Inevitably any time that anything changes the concern will always be, ‘Well, how do I find the time to do this?’ ” The management of change would be just as important as bringing in the new ideas, because if the staff had not been properly prepared then a negative response would be a certainty.

SMT No 3 also believed that distributed leadership could be improved in a number of ways. Firstly, the culture within the school would begin to change as people felt more comfortable doing things. The fastest way of securing change was to embrace those members of staff with distributed leadership skills as opposed to trying to change those who were set in their ways. A key point to note here is: “The ones who accept distributed leadership are the leaders of the future.” Unfortunately, though, these were the staff that would tend to move on so there was a high turnover of people who were distributed leaders and a low turnover of those who were comfortable in their work.

### **Discrepancies**

When asked whether there were any discrepancies with distributed leadership across the HODs all three members of SMT agreed that there were. All agreed that some HODS did a great job of using distributed leadership; but then there were departments that did not want distributed leadership and

found it difficult and uncomfortable, and therefore did not make the effort with it.”

Interestingly, two members of SMT had very different ideas about how one department embraced distributed leadership. One stated: “I think the manager of the XXX department are set in their ways... not set in their ways but have a sort of, don't want to change anything because it isn't broken. And you've got no evidence to change anything because your results are some of the best in the school.” The other's viewpoint was: “They have a daily meeting over tea and coffee. Within that formal and informal structure there is a huge amount of team building that goes on...”

SMT No 1 believed that there had been much hard work over the previous few years to get more consistency across the departments in terms of what was expected but that: “There are still heads of department who have not taken on board aspects of what is required of them, e.g. work sampling.” Some departments had a very clear evidence base for where the department currently stood, whilst others simply felt “if it ain't broke, don't fix it”, and that was where the discrepancies lay. It was noted that it was very difficult to get consistency across all departments because of dealing with individuals and departments who all had different needs. It was very different managing a Modern Languages department where there were numerous different subjects compared to managing an RE department where everyone thought in roughly the same way and had the same ethos in what they were trying to achieve.

SMT No 2 believed that certain departments had a very clear idea of the communication systems that were in place to ensure that every member of the team understood what the departmental drive was. Some of the departments did this in a very formal manner and others were much more informal. Within the formal and informal structure, a huge amount of team building took place. It was clear that: “In a department like RS there is an awful lot of informal distributed leadership going on there because of the way in which they work with each other – the common drives and motivations are there – but there are some departments where the heads of department are either less effective in their communication strategies or are too busy dealing with their own personal issues and can’t really spend time focusing on the team and how to get the best out of it. It’s time isn’t it, it’s that timing thing.”

The response from SMT No 3 echoed the answers of the other two. They agreed that the best heads of department got on with it and did a good job, only occasionally checking in with SMT for advice or counsel. However, at the other end of the spectrum there were people that didn’t want distributed leadership and wanted “to teach the curriculum and nothing else”.

### **Leadership vs Management**

When questioned about whether there was a divide between a leader and a manager two out of the three members of SMT were in agreement that leadership and management go hand in hand. SMT No 2 felt that, yes, there was a divide, but this was based primarily on her own personal situation rather than a reflection on the school staff. They believed: “There’s a definite divide

between a leader and a manager. Management skills came easily to me but leadership didn't. I had to learn leadership skills... people skills are very important and it's about vision and strategy, not day to day management, and that is why I shouldn't be a headteacher – because I don't have that vision and strategy. They're not my strengths.”

SMT No 1 did see a divide between the two but related the difference to the job description. “A manager is primarily the nuts and bolts side of things, making sure that everyone has what they need, that resources are appropriate, that specifications are correct...Leading is really about trying to take every single member of the team forward to the best of their ability.”

SMT No 3 held the view that someone who is good at one is usually good at the other. “The difference is in the emphasis that a person places on one of those aspects rather than the other, but they are linked and the school needs both in varying proportions.”

### **Benefits of distributed leadership to SMT**

The final question was aimed at two SMT members and asked whether they felt that they got distributed leadership from the headteacher and could they then encourage distributed leadership to their HODs? SMT No 2 felt that there were indeed certain things that the head was happy for her to take on and did not require any specific feedback with regards to these items. He was confident in her abilities and therefore happy to pass things over. Equally, he was available if required. In terms of encouraging distributed leadership down

the line to the HODs: “I’m not certain that the relationship with the headteacher and deputy has any effect on how I treat my departments. I think the departments see distributing the leadership is about whether the person is capable of doing the job. I mean, when you’ve got the departments I have, I haven’t really got a significant weak link... I don’t have to do a lot.”

SMT No 3 questioned whether they got delegation or distributed leadership from the head. Due to the head being new to the role, and also partly due to his own role changing, he believed that there had been a large amount of delegation rather than distributed leadership. He believed that the head was beginning to feel more confident in how they can take things on. “I guess child protection is a very good example of distributed leadership because he has been very much ever present on that, it hasn’t been a case of ‘here’s the ball, catch’ which has been the case with one or two of the other things he has passed on. Whereas with child protection he has very much taken the approach of being there on my shoulder for the first two cases and then he has stepped back a little bit more and now just cross-checks what’s going on. So, now he’s empowered me in that regard.” However, he did not feel that anything had changed in the way that he dealt with his teams as he felt that he was aware of the philosophy prior to the arrival of the new head, but he did carefully encourage distributed leadership and incorporate it into his departments.

All three believed that distributed leadership was important for the success of the case study school and indeed for schools in general. Two were cognisant of the ideas surrounding educational leadership theory in that an organisation

such as a school can no longer rely on leadership from only one or two key people in that organisation. The stereotype “grand leader” theory was seen to be a redundant model now: authority and power should be shared, for example through heads of department, to ensure success and wider school improvement.

### **Middle Leaders Interview**

**Table 10: Profile and length of service: Middle Leaders**

| <i>Interviewee Number</i> | <i>Job Title</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Length of Service (at x school )</i> |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------------|---|
| 1                         | Middle Leader    | Male          | 3 years                                 |
| 2                         | Middle Leader    | Female        | 22 years                                |
| 3                         | Middle Leader    | Male          | 4 years                                 |
| 4                         | Middle Leader    | Male          | 3 years                                 |
| 5                         | Middle Leader    | Female        | 16 years                                |
| 6                         | Middle Leader    | Male          | 26 years                                |
| 7                         | Middle Leader    | Female        | 24 years                                |
| 8                         | Middle Leader    | Male          | 5 years                                 |
| 9                         | Middle Leader    | Female        | 12 years                                |
| 10                        | Middle Leader    | Male          | 14 years                                |

## **Understanding of distributed leadership**

The ten heads of departments were interviewed and asked a similar set of questions as the senior management team. In terms of the first question “What do you understand by the term distributed leadership? (DL or delegation?)”, there were very mixed responses and interpretations of the concept itself. The majority of the HODs did understand what the concept was, but from their responses it appears it wasn’t something that they were familiar with in their departments at school. Within their answers, most referred to the theory of it rather than being familiar with the practice in the workplace.

HOD No 1 spoke about it being: “the intelligent use of delegation in order to be able to reach a common goal”. They believed that it was about empowering the middle managers and giving them responsibility while at the same time gaining their buy-in which they stated was very important if everyone was trying to reach the same goals.

HOD No 2 saw distributed leadership as a team working together within a specific formal structure. Roles would be allocated to a specific person and completed through teamwork, shared ownership and enabling heads of department to be leaders in their own right.

HOD No 3 had not heard of the term before but thought that: “It is the chance for lots of people to take part in leading whatever issues need to be led within the school.” They felt that it was a combination of leadership and delegation,

with people: “working together to bring about a change in something or to put something together”.

HOD No 4 felt that, in terms of their department: “It would be trying to convince people that they are going in the same direction and not being asked to do tasks without an explanation and they can see purpose in it.”

Like HOD No 3, HOD No 5 had never heard of the concept before being given the questionnaire. “Before you and I discussed it, it wasn’t a term that I was familiar with, but it seems to me that the clue is in the title. Basically, it’s about leadership which is not centrally focused, it’s distributed to the organisation, probably at middle management level...You are delegating the power to define functions and define the direction of the institution as a whole, so distributed leadership definitely involves delegation; but it’s delegation of power as well as responsibility.”

Having read the articles that accompanied the questionnaire, HOD No 6 stated: “My sense of distributed leadership was that it was far less about hierarchy and much more about using the management team at all levels to enhance and develop the vision of the school as a whole, so that you are using, for example, your HODs or other middle management to all lead the school forward.”

## **Shared Leadership**

HOD No 7 stated that distributed leadership was: “sharing out leadership roles, more so than you would under a more traditional hierarchical structure. I would imagine it would involve a lot of empowerment in terms of responsibility with people lower down the chain of command, lower down the management structure, than would have [been the case] previously.” They also felt it could potentially involve de-layering an organisation and removing layers of management if those lower down the hierarchy were given increased responsibility.

HOD No 8 spoke about the need for a flatter leadership structure and there being a two-way relationship between the senior management and middle management, developing a more shared approach which would be advantageous to both, and: “which probably makes a more coherent overall pattern... You play to individual strengths and you would be giving them, distributing to them, things that you think they are good at, that they would benefit from either career-wise, just enjoy doing or it would enhance the department.”

HOD No 9 fully understood the concept, stating: “It’s the notion that there is a leadership team or a leader that devolves, distributes certain initiatives to their immediate senior leadership team and then this may in turn be filtered down to heads of department... It’s a fully cascading process from the top downwards.” It was described as being not just delegation but a shared desire to move forward in the same direction.

The last HOD to be questioned (HOD No 10) was very positive about distributed leadership. They understood the concept and stated: “It’s sharing jobs out in many ways. It’s looking at moving the school forward by utilising people’s different skill bases and expertise through shared leadership. It’s delegation as far as I can see, which I think gives everybody an opportunity to have some form of ownership of what evolves; but it also utilises people’s wider world experiences too, so therefore it’s a non-threatening progression.” They believed it to be a very positive thing, as: “The most important thing in an organisation is to ensure that people have some form of ownership of decisions that are made; they feel as if they have made some sort of contribution to it.”

### **Autonomy**

The second question asked whether the HODS felt that they had autonomy/freedom as a leader. The resounding response from all HODs was, yes, within their own departments.

HOD No 1: “does not get anyone interfering with the qualifications that I look at to deliver, the resources, the schemes of work, the way in which I run my team”. Interestingly, this HOD believed that more could be done within the organisation. They weren’t aware of where the people in team were on the pay scale which meant that they had no idea if they were dishing out work and responsibility fairly amongst the team. They would have liked more transparency so that they can delegate: “appropriately and fairly”.

HOD No 2 was also very positive about the autonomy they had. “Although there is a structure for you to work in, there is flexibility to do different things or do things a different way. We also have the chance each year to bid for money, to put things forward, to bid for trips. So you are able, in a sense, to drive the department where you want it to go. Definitely.”

HOD No 3 also felt that they had autonomy within their department. They felt valued, and that certain changes that had taken place within the department were discussed with other department members as well as the senior management team and: “My opinions count and people listen to them. I listen to the team as well and, together, we try to bring about change.”

HOD No 4 believed that they had “accidental autonomy”. They felt that they had been fortunate that year to: “effectively have had autonomy in terms of teaching, social development and curriculum development in the department”. They appreciated that this wasn’t the case in every school as Senior Management can indeed impose syllabuses and styles of teaching; but at the time of interview, compared to colleagues in other schools, there was the autonomy to do things their way.

HOD No 5 definitely believed that they had autonomy as a manager. They were able to get on with what needed to be done and both they and the Department were appraised according to results. However, when discussing autonomy as a leader, the response was very different: “My sense is that I don’t have the time and the space to engage in the leadership that I would like... If you are talking about leadership at departmental level, then to me

leadership is about creativity, it's about vision, it's about exploring all sorts of things beyond the norm and beyond the horizon. It's almost like a five-year plan... But that takes time and broadly speaking I don't have time to do the stuff that I would like to do... If you are talking about distributed school leadership, do I feel as if I have autonomy as a leader to contribute to school leadership? My sense would be no, I don't get the impression that I contribute to school leadership particularly. I don't think I have ever been invited to really.”

Within their department, HOD No 6 felt that they did have autonomy to try and lead in the best way that they could and that the senior management team were very supportive. The situation had improved over the previous few years and what couldn't be done initially was slowly beginning to happen. “So, in terms of autonomy as a head of department, I don't feel that we are strait-jacketed by senior management in a way that some people are at head of department level in perhaps the state sector from talking with friends.”

HOD No 7 also felt positive about having autonomy/freedom as a leader. The most important decision that they could be asked to make: “would be something like a change of syllabus or exam board which I actually did do a few years back. I approached my SMT link and was told that it was my decision... it was briefly discussed at a heads of department meeting but I very much felt that it was my decision and it was certainly supported by the senior leadership at the time.” This is the level of leadership that they would have expected to have complete control over as a head of department.

It is clear that, within the case study school, autonomy and freedom were apparent amongst all heads of department and they were content with the level of responsibility that they had at the time of interview. HOD No 8 added: "I think this school has always been very good at allowing heads of department to look at things like exam courses; there has been no central dictatorship with that, they have been flexible in how you allocate your staff to teaching groups... we have considerable freedom of action... I've been here a long while and feel happy with the freedoms that I think have always been a core part of here."

HOD No 9 also believed that they had autonomy and freedom as a leader. "Maybe that's partly a function of the type of institution that we work in... In terms of the curriculum I feel that I more or less have complete freedom at Key Stage 3. I have an eye on the national framework, but the direction the department wants to go down is down to me and I enjoy that aspect of it very much." They felt that the ideas they put forward and the ideas that they had were listened to, but that the responsibility had been placed on them to do the appropriate research, make the right decisions and to then pass that up the chain of command.

Another positive response was received from the last head of department questioned, HOD No 10. They believed that they had autonomy/freedom as a leader within their department. Admittedly, they stated: "Some things are constrained by the exam boards, and therefore it's not always possible to teach what you would like to teach in some areas. But that's curriculum development and with very bright children you can swing things slightly

provided you don't lose track of what the exam board wants. So, from that point of view and from a budgetary point of view, yes, as long as I keep within my budget I can make decisions."

## **Ownership**

In terms of their contribution to the leadership process, everyone involved in the questionnaire believed that they had ownership of the leadership within their own departments and were very happy with the situation, although initially some were confused by the phraseology. A minority of heads of department had the vision to extend the ownership to whole school level.

HOD No 1 explained: "I don't have someone saying you need to manage it this way or that way... I know you respect me enough to know that I am leading my team and I'm leading it to the best of my ability. If ever I need help I know that there are certain members of staff that I can come to."

HOD No 2 was initially confused by the term "ownership". Following a brief explanation about leadership being their own or guided by someone, they felt that middle management should work within the structure of the school development plan; therefore, leadership is neither his/her own nor guided. "You have an ownership in terms of what happens in your area... Some staff members only think about their department but it shouldn't be about that, it should be about the whole school. For me, it's about the school."

Another positive response came from HOD No 3: “I think I’m aware of all the schemes of work and I know what people are doing. I don’t know exactly how they’re teaching but I try to watch everybody within the department so I’ve got a good idea of what’s going on and then I feel like I’m in control of changes that are implemented.”

HOD No 4 believed that he had ownership of leadership but that the ownership was shared as a department. “I would look at it the other way. I wouldn’t wish to impose. I think it would be foolish of management to impose a structure on teachers that they didn’t want, or they couldn’t see the point of, or they felt was against their professional expertise.” A negative point highlighted was the ever increasing paperwork and bureaucracy: “The more they try and make sure the teaching is right by insisting on more and more bureaucratic elements to it, ticking boxes, then the less time people are able to spend on the teaching.”

HOD No 5 viewed ownership of leadership positively: “I don’t feel as if there’s a tremendous imposition or interference, but clearly accountability for one’s performance. But it’s rather nice. I don’t feel micro-managed.”

HOD No 6 commented: “I do have ownership of it [leadership], yes, obviously because as head of department you are responsible for that department, how you lead it and what we do... Although you might have ownership of what you want to do, that ownership is going to be influenced by certain factors within the department or the school that might prevent you from moving things through perhaps as quickly as you want to. So, I do have ownership of it but I

think you've got to moderate that ownership depending on context and circumstances...Unless you can take people with you there is actually no point in having the ownership of it, or the vision."

HOD No 7 believed that they had the right amount of leadership and decision-making power and would not wish to have any more. "At head of department level I think it's the right level, because of course as a head of department you don't necessarily see the overall picture in terms of, say, the curriculum the way that someone on the senior management team might."

HOD No 8 also felt that they had ownership of leadership in terms of leading a department. However, in terms of the bigger picture and understanding where their place was within the school development plan they were less certain. They: "can see where using what we do in the department and what I do as a leader of that department is improving it. But, it's never been quite clear, quite apparent, how that fits in the bigger picture. Apart from the idea of, you keep needing to reflect and modernise and adapt while not losing all the best features that you already have...You don't get much training as head of department, do you?"

HOD No 9 also thought that they had ownership of leadership. The way they led the department was monitored but not excessively. "There are formal and informal meetings that take place where targets are set and quite often the targets are based on some leadership aspect to them. As leader within the department I think I am listened to and my judgements are implemented. But, there is quite often a need to re-evaluate and to sit down regularly with the

department and just remember where we are going and where we are trying to go.”

HOD No 10 certainly believed that they had ownership of the department as well as elements of ownership of some of the decisions that were made within the wider range of the school, for example, the curriculum committee. “I had major input last time and I’m on the committee again so that means that there are some elements that I am well and truly embedded in.”

### **Leader and Manager**

All heads of department saw themselves as a leader and a manager. Key points that came across were leading the team and taking the department forward combined with managing daily tasks, although it was generally felt that daily management takes away from crucial thinking/leading time.

HOD No 1 said: “You can lead by a good example, you can share best practice... but sometimes, there’s some management to go on as well... so you’ve got to put both hats on and they are very different skills.”

HOD No 2 agreed: “I think there’s elements of both [leader and manager] and I think, at this school at this moment in time and the way the structure is, there needs to be both.”

HOD No 3 believed that they are: “Probably a bit of both; in terms of, I suppose, leading you’re hopefully going to set a good example and make sure

that things are working properly the way you do them to then hopefully showing everyone else how to do them. Then managing, I suppose it's making sure that the resources are in the right place at the right time."

HOD No 4 felt that the head of department job is a strange one. Whilst agreeing that it is necessary to be a leader and also manage the department, he compared it to industry where you wouldn't be leading a team whilst also doing the job at the same time. "It's a strange job; it's more like a player manager of a football team. They tend not to be very successful."

HOD No 5 stated: "I would like to see myself as both. I don't think one can get away from the management bit. I don't particularly revel in it but that's the reality of the job... It's such a big thing that it takes up the vast amount of time, energy and space that's available and therefore the ability to be a leader as well is very much curtailed."

HOD No 6 put forward a slightly different viewpoint: "Management is the crux probably on a day-to-day basis of what I do, and leadership is there but I don't think that's perhaps as defined as I would like it to be... Factors within the department have prevented me from perhaps being able to plan, develop and create a vision for the future." Leadership and management go together: by effectively managing you are also trying to lead.

HOD No 7 agreed that the head of department role had elements of both leadership and management, although this was dependent on the department, the experience within that department and the dynamics too. "I would imagine

that in some departments where a lot of changes have already occurred and the team is working very, very well together the role of the head of department might be more about management, whilst there might be other departments where changes are required and initially the head of department role may have to be more about leadership.” He recognised that leadership played an important role with regard to forward planning and departmental objectives whereas timetabling was more a case of management. Overall, a head of department needed a mixture of both at different points during the academic year. The demographic of the department played a part in how much leadership and management are required. “A head of department who is managing colleagues who are close to retirement may have more of a management role compared to a head of department who has got a very young, perhaps relatively inexperienced team.”

HOD No 8 viewed himself as a leader and manager. Management keeps everything going, but in terms of relationships with staff you have to be a leader. It’s important to question what teaching is planned for topics, share resources and be a non-threatening leader. “Anyone can distribute past papers and mark schemes. Leadership is helping people to see how best we can encourage our candidates to achieve.”

HOD No 9 saw themselves as a hybrid of the two. “I think a head of department needs a keen eye for detail and that falls down to the management side of things; but also you need to have ideas, you need to have a direction in which you want to go and you want to take people with you – that’s the leadership side of the role.” Although the leadership side of the

role could potentially be easier, it was necessary to use good management skills to make sure things got completed and then implemented.

HOD No 10 agreed that the role involved leadership and management although these skills had evolved through trial and error over the years rather than from specific training. Almost two decades previously, when starting the role, no training was given: "So my management and leadership skills have had to evolve over time and to begin with limped along from crisis management to crisis management until you get a grip on things and you begin to realise that you can head things off at the pass and that's where leadership comes in and then management." Due to the training that is available nowadays, the transition and differing role of manager and leader is probably more helpfully defined as opposed to it being stumbled on by accident.

### **Benefits of distributed leadership**

When questioned about the benefits that could exist by enhancing their distributed leadership role for the wider gain, all responses were relatively similar. All heads of department could see the benefits for the case study school.

An interesting point was raised by HOD No 1: "Whilst true distributed leadership is being employed it allows you to get on with your core skills set. So, the head can do the head things, the deputies can get on and do the deputy things and heads of departments have true ownership of their role and

then that can disseminate even further down... It makes for a well-oiled machine, really." All teachers intrinsically have leadership skills – they lead their classes daily, but the skills need to be employed in a different way.

HOD No 2 believed that there would be more crossover with the departments or perhaps more links out in the community. "Rather than seeing it as your own department, you are perhaps working as part of a team that would deal with the arts, or a certain type of learning... Faculties."

Feeling valued and involved at the decision-making stage was a point noted by HOD No 3. Management of change was a lot easier when people had had their opinions considered because they were more willing and open to it. "If it's their suggestion they are more willing to go through and perhaps share that experience with other people and take charge and control that area. That could then be beneficial to everybody because each person feels like they are valued." Feeling valued was important to further leadership which could then be linked to developing the school as a whole.

HOD No 4 put the question round the other way in that they saw anything that they did needing to fit in with the whole school ethos. "It is a strength of this school that there are people who are expected to teach different subjects, and while I would not necessarily export their own solutions and their own running of their own departments to what we do, the fact that they exist, you make it an automatic premise to respect everyone else's department."

HOD No 5 considered the benefits for the institution through enhancing distributed leadership. At the time of interview there appeared to be a qualitative divide between SMT and the rest of the staff: a small group of people had the overall picture and were developing the vision and priorities for the future, with the herd/staff following. "I think that if you were to change that slightly, the institutional benefit would be that the herd feel more as if they are stakeholders in the enterprise and less sort of employees." In the case study school there was a need for more communicational sharing of what the vision was and therefore empowering staff to come on board; at the end of the day, institutions are not democracies. "I think that's the institutional benefit of this distributed leadership model. I think you get more of a cultural bind, a longitude of cultural binding institution – a sense of synergy." heads of department focused on what needed to be done as well as taking into account a limited view of the whole school vision. If that were to be expanded people could contribute more. "Personally I think I have more to offer, but that potential at the moment is just not going to be utilised."

HOD No 6 believed that communication was the key to distributed leadership. Staff needed to be fully engaged in the process and the reasons behind why they were doing it. If senior management communicated better to heads of departments then it could be cascaded down.

HOD No 7 felt that if decisions were made at the lowest level, or even the lowest feasible level, there were many key benefits. People taking the decisions would feel empowered, more responsible and more motivated and were therefore likely to work better for the organisation. It offered a degree of

ownership of those decisions. An obvious benefit was the freeing up of senior management time, and: “The degree of trust that it creates between middle and senior management is going to be good for the overall success of the organisation, whether it’s a business organisation or indeed a school.”

HOD No 8 also saw the obvious advantages for the senior management as they would have a more co-ordinated and more energised middle management. Heads of department could feel less like individuals and more like they were sharing a common purpose. “I think distributed leadership could distribute to a faculty of subjects, a group of subjects, where we feel that you could play a really vital role in moving things forward.”

HOD No 9 believed that they would like to operate outside their departmental area and felt that they had more to offer than their leadership role provided. They pointed to working groups, focus groups and curriculum review groups that were perhaps too tightly controlled in the case study school – do these groups have any real power?

For HOD No 10 there was a very delicate balance between distributing leadership more widely and then reaching “paralysis through analysis” where nothing moved at all. Involving numerous people did empower them, but compromises did need to be reached in order to allow progress. “There is a fine line balance between keeping people on board and losing people because they don’t feel they are being valued.”

## **Link to school improvement**

There was complete agreement amongst all the interviewees about distributed leadership being linked to whole school improvement. Support equated to willingness to work, which in turn made the school a better place.

HOD No 1 believed that the school improvement and development plan was the vehicle to empower. “The head has his goals, deputies take on the goals in order to help the head achieve them and it then cascades down to the heads of department – it’s a whole school thing.”

As far as HOD No 2 was concerned, in the right environment and culture, distributed leadership and school improvement could be linked, but that culture needed to be created. In education it was not always easy to bring people on board.

HOD No 3 felt that staff need to feel valued and part of a team for it to work. “If someone is taking part in leading something then I think that overall it will lead to general improvements. The more people you get involved the better it could be... With iGCSE, half of the department were quite strongly in favour and half against it. When we did it, those that were against it took it on board and enjoy teaching it now so I think that you can modify people’s opinions.”

HOD No 4 referred specifically to the running of the department as opposed to the whole school. “I could be criticised for what might be considered a hands-off approach, but I’ve always taken the view that you get the best teachers in

and then let them do their job. You give them the tools to do it and you support them. I've never met a teacher who doesn't want to do a good job." Bearing in mind that the case study school was promoting independent learning, it would seem a contradiction to treat staff differently to the way that the children were treated.

HOD No 5 discussed synergy and cultural cohesion as enablers and the way to get more out of staff. The case study school relied in part on the goodwill of staff: "A lot of the value added, the extra things, music, whatever it is that makes this place so great – a lot of that I think is done by people because they believe it is the right thing to do... The more you can engender and support that then the more you will get out of them and the better the school will be."

HOD No 6 highlighted how working at a micro level could mean working in isolation. A department head feeding through to their staff in department meetings meant lots of individual departments were doing their own thing. "If distributed leadership gets all levels of management on board, singing from the same hymn sheet and feeding that through and having the same discussion at that micro level, that feeds into the bigger picture about what we're all doing and why we are doing it... You've all got to be on board, believing in it and wanting to do it or it becomes slightly more fractured." Communication was the key. Tightening up the roles of leadership at senior management and head of department level would bring about a much stronger sense and a much clearer sense of why things were being done. Staff needed to understand that "it's not just about me having ownership of my

role as head of department; it's about people having ownership of their place within the school and their commitment to it...You've got to create the idea that we're all here because what we want to do is have a better school for all of us, pupils and staff alike." This could only be achieved through everyone sharing the same vision and the same targets. By doing this people were able to become leaders in their own right.

HOD No 7 felt that: "Any system that may enhance the efficiency of the school, the motivation of the staff, that might improve the speed and quality of decisions is clearly going to affect those departments and collectively those improvements within the departments are going to be reflected in terms of improvements within the school." There may be lots of small, incremental, continuous improvements, where a small step made by one department might not look like much but, when combined with small steps made by other departments, added up to quite a significant change over a period of time. "That clearly has benefits for our success, our future and our job security."

Distributed leadership and school improvement had to be linked according to HOD No 8. If everyone was working in isolation in their department it would be random, chaotic and unplanned. At school level there needed to be a coherent vision rather than a dictatorial approach. "To me, it needs to be broken down into slightly more accessible chunks... I think it would be easier if it's explicit, e.g. we want a drive for presentation skills, or debate skills or whatever."

HOD No 9 believed there was a definite and clear link between distributed leadership and school improvement. “We are a good conduit, aren’t we, on implementation of where the school has to go. I think we all believe that, okay, we can be told to do things, but I think we all believe that we want the school to be a better place and to do better at whatever level we are working at... Our role as a middle manager can have a big influence.”

HOD No 10 saw strong links on a lot of different levels. “Distributed leadership may be the evolution of roles within school and so people with certain expertise can be appointed to look after key areas of the school. Shared leadership within school allows people to develop particular skills. What needs to be looked at is what the umbrella management system of this shared leadership is going to be. People need to have very, very clear ideas about how your very small part fits into all the rest of the cogs within the school and therefore there has to be a very clear sight and purpose as to what the school is aiming to do and where or how it is going to achieve those aims and what your role within that process is going to be.”

### **Enhancement of distributed leadership**

The final question asked how distributed leadership could be enhanced so as to raise school improvement. Everyone was unanimous in stating that it fell short at the time of interview.

HOD No 1 believed that there was not total ownership of teams in terms of the transparency about points and pay structure. Therefore, one way in which

things could be improved would be by knowing how fairly the work could be distributed. “If people have got points and time on the timetable we really should be making sure that they are giving back to the school what we are giving to them and I’m not sure that this is happening in all areas.” A proper reporting structure would be very beneficial combined with knowing the staff better in a broader sense e.g. pay scales, time on timetable and knowing what they had on their plate. “Everybody has got to understand what’s in it for them, why they would be doing it, and one of the things that we’d be doing it for is in order to be able to empower them, and that could be far more valuable than pound notes, that feeling of worth and belonging and whatever it is that they are doing does count... Being valued.”

HOD No 2 felt that staff needed to be aware of the vision for the school, not just where it might want to go for a couple of years but for the longer-term future, and they needed to connect with that. Governors could present to staff about areas of school development in order to engage them. “Education is very slow in making changes compared to industry. Numbers, open days, getting the name out to promote the school – staff don’t seem to realise that without making the effort it won’t be possible to keep school numbers high...”

HOD No 3 discussed assessing people’s strengths and possibly sharing an area that they were good at with the whole school or simply within the department. “If we share our expertise within or across departments that would certainly improve the performance of the school and could be a real benefit to us all. This could then be distributed leadership in action as well as school improvement in action.”

As far as HOD No 4 was concerned, the biggest barrier to school improvement was time and, in the case study school, space. "I think the major problem is to allow people time to use the space more successfully. I think there's a lot of expertise in this school but people don't have time. One of my own failings is that I spend 70-80% of my time dealing with the moment rather than planning for the future."

In order to enhance school improvement through distributed leadership, HOD No 5 believed that people needed to be involved in decision making. "Give middle managers the time and the space to engage with it in a realistic way. If you were to do one and not the other it's not going to work." They added that: "time and space is vital to developing distributed leadership which could and should lead to school improvement."

HOD No 6 felt that, at the time of interview, it seemed that the development plan was done in isolation. "I think it's about making people feel valued because if they feel valued they want to put more into the system, they want to commit to it." Communal vision was key because if the middle managers were not on board with the senior management then no improvement would take place.

HOD No 7 felt that this question was hard to answer as they believed that the amount of power and decision making responsibility that they possessed at the time was about right and they did not yearn for any more. "I think the balance of power, so to speak, is about right. I for one don't want any extra responsibility placed upon me whether that is distributed or delegated."

Communication could be more individualised (or directed at groups rather than towards everyone) according to HOD No 8, especially from senior down to middle management. “Some communication is very poor and far too generalised in approach. It can be very vague”.

For HOD No 9, distributed leadership could be enhanced in order to raise school improvement by looking at the expertise amongst middle managers and developing it further, for example by sharing good practice with other schools over key areas such as the use of data and tracking student progress. Also, middle managers could take the lead on key projects; whilst there may not be more pay afforded to such work, the sense of being listened to and the feeling that one is contributing in a positive way would be benefit enough. It would lead to a greater sense of job satisfaction as well as enjoyment, and thus it would be a benefit to the school.

HOD No 10 stated that people’s strengths needed to be identified and assessed, after which those individuals needed to be encouraged to utilise those strengths in particular roles, then given positive feedback on what had been achieved. “If you’ve been given a role you need to feel as if it’s a valuable role... you have to make people feel important, even though you realise that, in the great scheme of things, this is only a minor thing that’s going on. But great journeys start with a single step. If you take lots of single steps you are going to get there quite quickly.”

It is clear from the data gathered in the questionnaires and interviews that there is much misinformation surrounding distributed leadership in the case

study school. Staff showed consistent responses which emphasised that distributed leadership was neither present in the school nor understood holistically as a concept. As we refer to the analysis of written responses, we can see this trend in even more vivid terms.

## **Chapter 5 – Analysis**

Before examining in detail the varied responses to the preliminary and fundamental question “What is distributed leadership?” given by the heads of department and members of the senior management team who were interviewed, let us briefly recap our working definition as elaborated in Chapter 2. The objective of distributed leadership is school improvement. The mechanism is a style of leadership, namely involving some form of delegation of leadership through the school hierarchy, playing to individual and corporate strengths. To be successful, it is, by its nature, necessarily an exercise in flexibility, with a style tailored to the relative context of the school where all can be leaders in the broadest sense of the word (Bush, 2013; Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2006).

### **Distributed leadership as a concept**

In my case study school there was a mixed response to prior consideration of distributed leadership as a concept – in itself revealing of its relative presence in senior management team and head of department leadership. For a sizeable minority it was not well understood, their thoughts either (i) entirely derivative from the pre-interview material provided, or (ii) dependent on a degree of hypothesising. HOD No 8 was very cautious, often using qualifications like “perhaps”, whilst HOD No 10 admitted their explanation “sounds really vague”. Such hesitant and nebulous responses were commonplace, and well-illustrated by the honest admission of HOD No 7 that “I hadn’t heard of it at all”. Indeed, as will be seen below, many conceived of

autonomy as a department-specific concept, highlighting that an autonomous interaction at the level of school improvement was beyond the theoretical horizons of most, a reflection of the situation in the school.

However, whilst this does already demonstrate that distributed leadership was an unknown term to some, it does not follow that a distributed leadership style of management was not present in the school under another name or was not being (sub)consciously carried out in substance. Indeed, a smaller minority were already familiar with the term. For example, HOD No 3 understood the term from personal experience in the business sector, and indeed had imported distributed leadership to their department from this previous familiarity.

### **Distributed Leadership as Power**

A broad spectrum of prior consideration of distributed leadership was mirrored by the breadth of conceptualisation. In terms of the objective of distributed leadership, responses were the most consensual. Many (over 80%) agreed it was the articulation of a common vision for school and/or departmental improvement. HOD No 2 referred to it as the facilitation of a “common goal”, HOD No 1 as a Universalist vision, HOD No 3 as a directional effort. But beyond this point there were degrees of interpretation as to who formulated this vision. Some, like HOD No 5, considered it set at the discretion of the senior management team and therefore implicitly dictatorial, whilst others like HOD No 3 viewed it as equally dictatorial, but lower down the hierarchy, where heads of department explained both “tasks” and “direction”. Others, like

HOD No 8, viewed distributed leadership as so “de-layering” a process for the hierarchy that leadership of direction became largely decentralised. Some, like HOD No 9, acknowledged that there was a “structure” to distributed leadership, but did not isolate the nature of it. Furthermore, other important consequences of distributed leadership were sometimes elaborated. The most cogent, and significantly most in step with our working definition, was the account of HOD No 2 who explained distributed leadership as an “intelligent use of delegation”, a mechanism for getting staff to personally and professionally invest in the development of the school, thereby making it a positive, cohesive method of management, team-building and institutional improvement.

### **Ownership**

From this point, the mechanics and theory varied widely. Many emphasised the aspect of empowerment with degrees of detail. HOD No 6, like HOD No 2, emphasised the sense of “ownership” that distributed leadership disseminates, but also pointed to the importance of making any changes implicit in the style of administration and leadership palatable to staff; distributed leadership succeeded at this greatly, propagating a sense of “non-threatening progress”. Beyond this feeling of empowerment, other staff pointed to the genuine presence of empowerment which underpinned it. Both HOD No 8 and HOD No 10 emphasised how the delegation of responsibility and autonomy entailed a genuine empowerment of staff’s portfolio and conceptual horizons. As an extension of this, but also slightly distinct from it, was the occasional emphasis on playing to the individual and corporate

strengths of staff and departments in leadership roles, as outlined by HOD No 7 and more elaborately by HOD No 10.

The one-sided but essential division remained as to whether distributed leadership as a concept and in the reality of the school was a consultative delegation of authority and responsibility or a top-down dictatorship by the senior management team. This approach would concur with the arguments as advanced by Lumby (2013) and Hargreaves and Fink (2009). At one end of the spectrum, HOD No 1 considered that distributed leadership was “simply offloading jobs” with no substance beyond this, being foisted down the hierarchy. At the other was the view of HOD No 4 who characterised distributed leadership not simply as the delegation of responsibility of roles but also *power*, because the autonomy incumbent in those roles allows for degrees of personal definition of the role in terms of function and direction, just as HOD No 6 maintained that distributed leadership is more than a “rubber-stamp” since it begets ownership and consultation amongst the senior management team, heads of department and classroom teachers. Most came to a middle-ground position that it was a mixture of dialogue and dictation.

### **Understanding**

These initial responses to the first question “What is distributed leadership?” demonstrate two primary conceptual points. The first is that, when taken as a whole, heads of department seem to have covered the purview and design of distributed leadership – namely that it aims at school improvement, and is facilitated by distributed responsibility and autonomy down the hierarchy.

Secondly there was much less consensus or thought as to what this entailed for the structure of the school administration; as to who directed it, at what level it was most intense or more fundamentally at what level it was operative. As the opening admissions pointed out, this all leads to the conclusion that for the heads of department distributed leadership was a largely alien term; and, more fundamentally, there was only limited conceptual standardisation, with only limited degrees of agreement as to what it was, and very wide ranging interpretations of its mechanisms and consequences. This sense of conflicting levels of understanding as to what distributed leadership means is reflected in the literature (Mayrowetz, 2008).

### **Autonomy**

Beyond the theorising of heads of department, when presented with questions relating to the degree of actual autonomy delegated to them, the broad trend was that most agreed that they had genuine autonomy in decision making – provided, as in the words of HOD No 6, “things don’t go belly up!” Most agreed that this was in large part a virtue of the independent school system. HOD No 1 argued that when compared to friends in the state sector, heads of department had much greater autonomy in decision making, such as the large, fundamental decisions like syllabus and exam-board change (HOD No 8), to the small decisions, like trips (HOD No 9), and the structural ones, like personalised styles of management and leadership (HOD No 6).

Some emphasised the import of exam syllabuses as an external agent in degrees of autonomy. For example, HOD No 3 pointed out that in Key Stage

3, there was an almost unlimited autonomy in syllabus setting, but that this was by necessity restricted at Key Stage 4 by the national curriculum, though even then the choice of board and papers was largely at the discretion of the head of department, with the senior management team deferring to their experienced selection. HOD No 6 went further in pointing out that even when presented with a rigid exam board, as long as their syllabus criteria were met, heads of department could stray off the path to an extent in teaching relevant and interesting sub-topics. In this sense, the most foreboding external pressures on autonomy could be curbed by heads of department.

But most interesting was the commonly recurring comment, stated above, that the senior management team would nearly always defer to the experience and counsel of heads of department when it came to departmental policy. The consultation process was sometimes a formality: senior management teams would like to be notified about syllabus changes, but discretion was left with heads of department. In other areas which necessarily entailed greater senior management team involvement, such as staffing, HOD No 8 commented that there was always a dialogue and that the senior management team always strived to be as accommodating as possible. HOD No 9 went so far as to say that the hierarchical structure was no obstacle to head of department autonomy within the department.

HOD No 6, however, pointed out that in some circumstances senior management team rules could get in the way of departmental experience, as for example when students gain access to A-level subjects when they have got the necessary grade but have clearly been judged by the department as

unfit, yet the senior management team stick to the grade-based principle. Yet on the whole there was satisfaction.

This point is supported by Harris (2008) as well as Leithwood and Mascall (2008) who argue that an institution benefits from wider leadership distribution. This can take many forms as some are random whilst others are more carefully established. Leithwood et al. (2009) put the case forward for planned and aligned distributed leadership so as to engender a focused approach, which is what the evidence highlights in my case study school. Day et al. (2009) and Harris (2008) highlight the positive impact that distributed leadership can have on organisational outcomes. This is borne out above in the data. What underpinned all this was a pleasing sense of trust on the part of the senior management team for heads of department competency, which clearly adds to a joint sense of ownership and autonomy.

## **Trust**

It was very interesting to note the sense of trust felt by heads of department as this is a theme borne out in the literature. Fullan (2001), Hopkins and Jackson (2003) and Harris (2003) argue that capacity-building is an effective means of generating and sustaining school improvement. At the heart of capacity-building in some schools is distributed leadership in conjunction with related factors like trust. This point correlates with my case study school. Leadership in this sense rests in the amount of human potential available to be utilised within a school (Gronn, 2000). Thus, internal capacity within my

case study school demonstrates that distributed leadership has a positive impact upon school improvement and capacity-building.

### **Professional Development**

Hargreaves (2011) argued that leadership in schools was weakly distributed and remained largely with the Head Teacher when the traditional model of leadership is scrutinised. However, it would appear that over time more senior staff have been given leadership roles along with middle leaders. This is important because it is only when staff believe they are given real and regular opportunities to carry out leadership activities that they fully use their talents and share their knowledge and skills with others. This theory was borne out in the interview data and many of the participants would welcome such a stance. Distributed leadership therefore has the ability to act as a catalyst for offering appropriate professional development to those staff who are identified with high leadership potential (Hargreaves, 2011).

It has been noted that sustainable school improvement can be derived from creating a culture of distributed leadership throughout the school community as well as developing leadership capacity. Leadership capacity which engenders school improvement must refer to a broad-based and skilled level of involvement in the work of leadership. This work of leadership links to shared learning, leading a shared purpose and action. Again it was clear from the interviews that many of the participants actively desired to partake in leadership activities outside their department which would encourage and engender greater levels of school improvement at x school.

To bring about school improvement, the head is a leader but not a sole leader because other members of staff have key leadership roles (Gunter, Hall and Bragg, 2013; Bush, 2013). Having a broad base of leadership in a school setting can ensure that school improvement becomes the norm in a school – again something that was desired by the heads of department at x school (Hargreaves, 2011; Harris, 2008). Building leadership capacity suggests a different model of power relations within a school as well as a change to authority within a school as an organisation. It suggests that leadership is a shared activity and that all teachers within a school should be involved in the process. This would then lead to a shared purpose and ambition for all. This process of all teachers being involved in leadership can help to create a scenario where school improvement becomes the norm in a school. Again this was a desired outcome at x school and was seen as something that would benefit the whole school at every level.

There were a few dissenting voices over the issue of departmental autonomy for heads of department. HOD No 2 said: “there is more that could be done”, arguing that whilst there was much that was positive, like a privation of senior management team interference with qualifications, resources, schemes of work and so on, the absence of transparency by the senior management team over the departmental wage scale prevented an equitable split of responsibilities by the head of department amongst the team. They also felt that the autonomy of the head of department was circumscribed when members of the department bypassed the head of department in going directly to the senior management team about initiatives and/or problems.

This showed a clear preference for a model which had a direct and rigid chain of command in the hierarchy. When we remember that HOD No 2 was previously in the business world, this may be explained as a transference issue to a different hierarchical world, but it still shows a degree of frustration over the limits of head of department autonomy.

On a separate note, HOD No 4 commented that, to their frustration, they did not have time or the space to “lead” at a departmental level, only to manage. By that HOD No 4 meant that they only had time to cover the essential managerial role, covering the day-to-day contingencies of the department, but could not lead in terms of a long-term plan for departmental development.

### **School Improvement and Vision**

However, crucially, whilst there was much positive feedback generally about head of department autonomy within the department, many had negative comments about their autonomy beyond it, especially as regards the formation of the vision for the school and school improvement beyond the parochially departmental. HOD No 4 commented that, as regards distributed leadership, a feeling of being involved in the crafting of school vision and improvement was absent. They felt that no invitation to partake with the senior management team and wider heads of department in formulating a coherent vision for school improvement had been extended. Further, they said that rather than there being any “incorporated feedback” from heads of department, decision-making existed only at “the higher level”, and when consultation occurred, the decision had already been made, and was simply

packaged to look like consultation. HOD No 6 added sanguinely that this prior decision-making happens in all organisations. Few heads of department made these comments, but those of HOD No 4 and HOD No 6 are very perceptive, and suggest an underlying, if minority, dissatisfaction with head of department access to the formulation of the direction and nature of school improvement. This is a clear sign that some overtly feel that distributed leadership is not practised in the school.

Alternatively, HOD No 10 commented that whilst they enjoyed great departmental autonomy, a persuasive argument could be made that so long as departments “ploughed their own furrow”, there could be no coherent standardised model for intra-departmental progress. This aversion to standardisation seems commonplace, as HOD No 3 commented from personal experience at a prior school that this was a destructive process for departmental autonomy; but this does not rule out a greater desire, as represented by HOD No 4 and HOD No 6, for greater dialogue between middle and upper management about the direction of school improvement vis-à-vis distributed leadership. As such there were some troubling comments about the absence of distributed leadership from the school when it came to school improvement.

The literature supports this situation, as Gunter and Ribbins (2003) argue that with distributed leadership it is not clear who does the distribution and who receives the distribution. This concurs with the data received at my case study school. The motivation behind people who promote distributed leadership also links to my findings above as Hatcher (2005), Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008)

and Hargreaves and Fink (2009) all question this which in turn was highlighted by the heads of department who were interviewed as it was felt that they were not involved in formulating or directing school improvement.

### **Ownership**

By extension, whilst many heads of department (over 80%) expressed a satisfactory sense of ownership at department level, some (about 40%) expressed discontent over their ownership of the vision for school improvement. This reveals a wide gulf of contentment between the departmental level and the school level. At the departmental level, many concurred with the view of HOD No 4 that there was no feeling of the senior management team micro-managing, imposing, or interfering with the departments, and that there was a clear, necessary rationale of accountability which underscored the hierarchy; hence a sense of unimpeded ownership was pleasingly present. Many also emphasised the willingness to carry classroom teachers with them in this unimpeded departmental vision.

HOD No 5 emphasised that reaffirmation of direction through regular formal and informal discussion within the department was essential for a mutually agreed and cogent development plan.

HOD No1 made the very sensible point that, as regards the relationship of head of department and teachers in the department: “unless you can take people with you there is actually no point in having the ownership of it, or the vision.”

HOD No 3 added that: “I wouldn’t wish to impose,” and that, since the senior management team didn’t impose, neither should the head of department on the classroom teachers. Clearly the hierarchy fostered a sense of benign ownership at the departmental level.

HOD No 7 made the point that, in certain areas of the school, there was a degree of intra-departmental ownership, as with the sciences, where their proximity of subject matter, teaching styles, classroom geography, and shared visions allowed for a large degree of shared ownership.

HOD No 6 also singled out the Curriculum Committee as another form of institutional ownership, having been a member for many years. This in turn again is supported by the literature through the work of Hatcher (2005), Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008), Hargreaves and Fink (2009) and Lumby (2013) who all argue that distributed leadership is often used as a tool to make teachers take on a heavier workload and by way of enabling standardisation practices. In this way it is seen that distributed leadership does not necessarily serve the greater good and can be bad leadership. As with my case study, the literature demonstrates that distributed leadership can cement authority and hierarchy and as such is not seen in a positive way. This is also supported by Harris (2009) who, whilst advocating the merits of distributed leadership and the link to school improvement, acknowledges that not all distributed leadership is inherently good as it depends very much on the school and how ready it is to change, its culture and its developmental needs. The purpose and pattern of distribution is also important as well as the relationships and trust in the school – themes already highlighted above.

## **Whole School vs Department**

However, in comments on ownership, the recurring theme of departmental satisfaction versus school-level dissatisfaction crept in. HOD No 10 had the strongest feelings, complaining that it was hard to understand where their place in the school's development was. It "has never been apparent" where the development of the department fitted into the development of school, beyond the nebulous principles of reflection and modernisation. They constructively pointed out that the format of the head of department meetings may be a cause of this, since issues discussed were usually department specific, and found this was part of a wider problem for heads of department: their own training had been limited to fire-fighting actions of management and basic principles of departmental leadership, but not distributed leadership style involvement in school direction.

In this same vein HOD No 6 repeated the frustration that the senior management team appeared to use the head of department meetings as a rubber stamp for pre-made decisions; but acknowledged that, whilst this was disheartening, it was necessary for some kind of direction for school improvement, perhaps tacitly revealing the same thoughts of head of department limitations which HOD No 10 had.

HOD No 9 made the interesting comment that: "I think, for some members of staff, they only think about their department; but it shouldn't be about that, it should be about the whole school." This fits in nicely with two immediate comments. Perhaps some heads of department and members of staff have a

much more limited vision and sense of position about their place in the school – having apparently neither the desire nor ability to involve themselves in the formulation of general school improvement. It would not be a contrivance to point out that what HOD No 10, HOD No 9 and HOD No 6 were calling for was a distributed style of leadership in the school. This seems to be contrasted against a more traditional segmented style of leadership personified by the comments of HOD No 8, who said the level of leadership and decision-making is: “the level I would expect and the level I would want”. The rationale underscoring this position is that jobs in the school should have strict purviews; the senior management team is in command of the overall picture of school improvement – the head of department neither needs nor wants it.

This issue of how far, if at all, a head of department should be involved in the formation of distributed leadership style school improvement is integral to and elaborated in the discussion of heads of department concerning the extent to which they are managers and/or leaders, and what that entails for their responsibilities. All agreed that their role involved a mixture of management and leadership but framed the relationship in slightly differing ways. HOD No 1 considered management as a basic form of leadership – the administrative “fire-fighting” over issues like staffing, textbooks and so forth – whilst leadership’s second part is “over-vision”, the forming of a vision for the macro and micro development of the department. Others like HOD No 5 made the two concepts more distinct, insisting a head of department needs a manager’s “keen eye for detail”, but also the leader’s ideas and vision. In these terms it is

a positive but distinct union where management is necessary to keep the vision of leadership from over-extending: to make sure the vision, however brilliant, is articulated effectively.

However, not all were as positive about this relationship. HOD No 4, as noted above, portrayed it as antagonistic at times, since management, whilst necessary for the smooth running of a department, is regrettable since it curtails the ability to lead expansively by taking up so much time and energy.

HOD No 8 and HOD No 3 took the different angle of explaining where and why management and leadership shift in departmental importance. HOD No 8 pointed out that where a department is established and running smoothly towards an already established vision, management predominates; in other cases, where departmental change is necessary, leadership is more important. For certain areas, like forward planning objectives, leadership predominates. With timetabling and so on, it is management. Equally, the demographics of a department may determine the dynamic: where much of the department nears retirement age, it is management; where there are young teachers, who lack experience, a leadership role in helping to draw out their potential is necessary.

HOD No 3 pointed out that in some cases management predominates over leadership, undermining the quality of a head of department on both counts, again stressing an antagonistic relationship. Here we see the crux of what most heads of department found most helpful in their ability to lead effectively at the departmental level: leading by example and experience. HOD No 2 and

HOD No 7 both emphasised this element, where experience and good example allow a vision which the rest of the department acknowledges is genuinely effective and are willing and eager to pursue it.

It is this theme, of effective participation in the department producing good leadership and management of it, which HOD No 9 elaborated as the principle by which heads of department should apply this to involvement in distributed leadership style school-wide vision. They perceptively commented that there is not enough of a dual perspective in the school in terms of thinking of the school as a non-profit business organisation as well as an educational institution. Heads of department, said HOD No 9, are too wrapped up in departmental concerns (for example, HOD No 1's comment that issues over staffing had prevented their attention to "over-vision") and not enough thought goes into making the school attractive to students. There is scant recognition that the school must have "a reputation, a position... of need in the community and that we maybe have to be more flexible to fit into that." Ultimately for the school to survive as competitive, HOD No 9 argued, this realisation must occur at all levels of the staff.

As in the state sector, the school needs to change to keep up with the changes in education. Because of this transitional period, focus has to move off purely departmental concerns and onto a rebranding exercise, underpinned by a decision as to which way the school will develop. The school needs to carve out a niche in the market in the way that academies are doing, and titles, portfolios and so on must shift with this conceptual transition. This data supports the arguments of Hopkins (2009) and Stoll (1999) who

both suggest that school improvement is at the heart of what goes on in schools and this includes leadership such as distributed leadership. They both highlight the importance of relationships within schools amongst teachers, morale, power issues and leadership.

The literature demonstrates that positive leadership is a powerful force for school effectiveness and improvement. It would appear in my case study school that this is lacking, as leadership and in particular distributed leadership is not harnessing and enhancing the skills and knowledge of the heads of department in order to create a common culture that is able to function in a positive and effective manner (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003). The points made by Harris (2004) are also reflected here as she observes that distributed leadership in a school setting is influenced by interpersonal factors like relationships between school management and teachers. The importance in relation to school improvement lies in colleagues' ability to influence each other and develop positive relations with school management.

Crucially for all of these frustrations over leadership relationships in the school, all heads of department agreed that distributed leadership has a clear gain to offer. The most recurring comments referred to the sense of ownership distributed leadership would instil in the school and the departments, and the positive effect this would have on job satisfaction and by extension the quality of teaching and management. HOD No 1 commented that certain concepts like target-setting would become much more palatable since they would be better explained to staff, and more attractive anyway because they had participated with the senior management team in setting them. Hence what

was currently viewed with cynicism would be viewed with appreciation. HOD No 4 encapsulated this belief by pointing to the likely transition which would follow from mere employee to stakeholder, drawing a helpful analogy of an end to the current system of the senior management team as shepherds and the heads of department as the herd who blithely followed directives. This was not to say that the school would become a democracy, but that it would produce a “cultural binding”, in terms of a shared vision of improvement for the school, binding staff together and effectively producing a better working environment.

HOD No 6 emphasised this as well, pointing to the “madness” of over-compensating for the current problems via the panacea of distributed leadership, commenting that over seventy equally valid opinions being put through the crucible would only produce indecision. This entailed a problem for them that nobody else picked up: namely that, whilst all saw the theoretical benefits of distributed leadership in the school, in reality it would be a very fine balancing act between decisive, consultative action planning and the maintenance of good relations between staff, many of whom may feel they were not being listened to sufficiently. This data supports the view of Leithwood et al. (2007) who make the point that different patterns of distributed leadership are crucial in attaining organisational improvement. This is augmented by Spillane (2006) and Harris (2005) who put the case forward that leadership in distributed format should be fluid or an emergent property. There needs to be both formal and informal forms of leadership practice.

Many heads of department (70%) felt that distributed leadership would lead to the development of faculties within the school. HOD No 9 commented that cross-collaboration between heads of department caused by the distribution of leadership would lead to the development of intra-departmental visions for the arts and sciences. HOD No 10 went further in suggesting an example of such a vision, where History, English, and RS might collaborate to specifically target literacy rates in the school.

HOD No 5 also pointed to the versatility of distributed leadership for curriculum development. The experience of those heads of department who collaborated on the decision as to whether to adopt the iGCSE could be capitalised upon to create a forum for heads of department to discuss pertinent issues common to a group of them. Finally, some, like HOD No 8, pointed to the benefits for the senior management team who would have more time to focus on areas of need having delegated some responsibilities down the hierarchy.

As regards the functioning of the school (as distinct from the benefits for school improvement which will be discussed shortly), with the slight scepticism of HOD No 6 as the exception, most would have agreed with HOD No 2 that distributed leadership would produce a “well-oiled machine”, harnessing the already present leadership skills of teachers forged in the crucible of the classroom to help bind staff together in a sense of value and ownership, whilst simultaneously allowing each person to get on with their “core skill set”, managing their portfolio with distraction minimised. A very positive force is then created.

## **School improvement**

As regards the impact distributed leadership could have on school improvement (Hargreaves, 2011; Leithwood and Mascall, 2008; Timperley, 2009) most heads of department (80%) answered positively. The same comments as above were reiterated in this context. HOD No 1 stated that without a dialogue about why decisions were being made, teachers would find it hard to invest in the vision of development, so it would never be pursued to its fullest potential. Indeed, neither would arising problems be satisfactorily resolved. HOD No 7 made the valid point that distributed leadership would work best at moments of division over policy direction. Whilst the leadership would have to side with one position over the other, the opposition must feel that whilst their position was not being acted upon, they were being listened to.

HOD No 5 went further in arguing that there is a natural willingness amongst all teachers to improve the school, and distributed leadership was well suited to actualising this desire. Heads of department would be natural conduits for tapping into that willingness, relaying experience on the ground from classroom teachers, and allaying their concerns, whilst helping to contribute to the senior management team-led vision-making and spreading that vision and making it acceptable to the school.

HOD No 8 encapsulated the potential gains nicely, arguing it would lead to better motivation of staff, improve the quality and speed of decision-making, and, by making decision-making consultative, contribute to effective school

improvement in the right direction. It would produce many small, incremental, continuous improvements which cumulatively will be big.

However, some heads of department pointed out the cultural and environmental pitfalls which would need to be overcome before distributed leadership could be effectively implemented to bring about school improvement. There were a number of cultural factors amongst the staff identified. HOD No 1 pointed out that a culture shift was needed whereby distributed leadership became part of professional development, not just another chore. HOD No 9 also argued that there had been a creeping sense that some members of staff were increasingly isolationist in their perspective. Some teachers were beginning to view themselves in isolation, focusing on their needs, their department's needs. They failed to view themselves as part of a team – a team including teachers, students and parents. In a large comprehensive, from past experience, this isolationism thrives because of intra-departmental competition about results and numbers. In the current school this was being caused by aggressive marketing of subjects upsetting other departments and creating isolationism – an obvious obstacle to the spread of collaborative ownership essential to distributed leadership.

What is clear in these comments is that a culture shift was necessary before distributed leadership could be implemented, in theory, and specifically in the school. Some teachers needed to broaden their horizons and view themselves as a unit rather than a collection of individuals whose departmental interests need not be so antagonistic. The comments of HOD No 10 would go some way to helping this. They claimed that there was too

much management and too little leadership at the moment, and the vision of the school needed to be “broken down into more accessible chunks”. Such a discussion within the hierarchy would help foster the culture conducive to the flourishing of distributed leadership in the school.

### **Enhancement of Distributed Leadership**

Many heads of department had constructive comments as to how distributed leadership could be enhanced, regarding school improvement. It was unsurprising that most of these suggestions were in line with individual strands of thought which had predominated throughout their interviews and the questionnaire. As regards classroom teachers and heads of department one comment made by HOD No 1 was that an essential enhancement in the circumstances of the school would be to bring in: “clearer lines of communication and opportunities for people to feed back their feelings, about what works well and what doesn’t work well”. They commented that a 20-minute appraisal meeting and setting of targets which aren’t taken entirely seriously anyway was an insufficient conduit for feedback.

This was a reflection of the cynicism in the system – people thought that it was not robust enough to be taken seriously. In such a current system, distributed leadership could not be implemented thoroughly, so an essential pre-requisite of the introduction of the system would be to establish superior lines of communication. HOD No 2 took this point even more fundamentally in stating that without knowledge of “what’s in it for them”, staff were always going to struggle to understand, and give feedback to, the system. HOD No 1

indeed made the candid admission that they still did not quite fully understand distributed leadership, which is illustrative of the communication problem present in articulating school improvement vision.

Secondly, many – indeed most – of the comments referred to redressing the relationship between heads of department and classroom teachers. A recurring comment was that heads of department should take time to identify the strengths of classroom teachers, and encourage them to utilise them, giving feedback as they aim for mutually agreed objectives. HOD No 7 suggested that a committee might be set up to formally oversee this professional development. Perhaps skills could be imported (both from inside and outside the school), transferred to relevant areas, and shared with other members of staff to help improve teaching across the board.

HOD No 2 took a separate issue, complaining, as already elaborated above, of a lack of transparency in terms of being able to judge the appropriate levels of workload and responsibility commensurate with pay levels and personal commitments. This line of thought followed the simple equation that, unless any new distributed leadership system sufficiently guaranteed that heads of department were provided with the data necessary to make decisions about who was equipped or even obliged to take on newly delegated responsibilities, then it would not be the enhancing tool for school improvement it otherwise could be.

Some specific ideas were suggested as to how the heads of department themselves could help enhance the system. HOD No 3 made the essential

point, as already seen above, that middle managers need the time and space to engage with shared decision-making in a meaningful way. There was no point bringing more people into the decision-making process unless heads of department had time to digest and incorporate their input. It would be appropriate to bring in the scepticism of HOD No 10, who claimed that creating that time and space was going to be very difficult, especially since some teachers lack the time and energy to do so much extra big-picture work, for example targeting literacy, especially for free.

This again justified the earlier points of some heads of department, that a cultural sea-change was necessary, in creating a sense of ownership and empowerment, which would persuade more people to become involved in contributing to the school improvement vision. HOD No 4 had a new suggestion as to how to achieve this, suggesting that new expertise was necessary amongst the middle management, perhaps derived from postings to other schools with distributed leadership already in place. This would help foster the culture and capacity to implement it, in turn creating ownership which would motivate staff. This supports the view of Harris (2008) and Leithwood and Mascall (2008) who argue that an institution benefits from wider leadership distribution. This can take different forms as some are random whilst others are more carefully established.

Harris (2008) puts the case forward that successful schools have restructured and redesigned so that leadership is deliberately more widely shared and spread. This point is hinted at in the data above at my case study school,

especially with the faculty idea, and links well to the view of Day et al. (2009) who argue for a co-ordinated approach to distributed leadership.

### **Senior Management Team**

Now to turn to the senior management team, which is a key area highlighted by Bush and Glover (2014) as well as Harris (2008 and 2013). Their responses will be considered between themselves and in contrast to those of the heads of department. The greater division we see, the more we can conclude that distributed leadership is not currently present, or alternatively that it is precariously present but not understood, and therefore not effectively articulated. The reverse equation of course holds true – if there are agreements then it is present and well-articulated – but, based on the evidence of the heads of department alone, it seems that there are strong degrees of confusion as regards the concept of distributed leadership, and only limited affirmations of its presence. The interesting question will be how far the senior management team considers it present – and to what intensity. At each point, where relevant, I will recap the majority opinions of the heads of department, to judge the levels of (in)congruence between them and the senior management team.

### **SMT understanding of Distributed Leadership**

There were contradictions in the answers of the senior management team as to how they conceived distributed leadership. SMT No 3 maintained that in a distributed leadership model there is exclusively what SMT No 1 called “direct

delegation”, that is, leadership roles delegated explicitly by the senior management team and therefore controlled at the discretion of the senior management team. However, SMT No 1 maintained that this direct delegation, the only form in a non-distributed leadership model, was supplemented by “inherent leadership”, where people at all levels of the hierarchy are empowered to use their initiative, “intuition”, and “nous”.

SMT No 2 did not fix on this element of intuition, but similarly disagreed with SMT No 3 in defining direct delegation as distinct from distributed leadership, because it entailed a system: “where leadership only comes from one or a few people”. As such, SMT No 1 and SMT No 2 maintained that inherent leadership (only SMT No 1 used this term, but their concepts coincided) was more expansive precisely because it is shared. It did not entail rigidly defined portfolios of responsibility, with the only element of sharing being that of oversight from the person above, but rather it is more fluid and inclusive precisely because the role is shared across one or more hierarchical tiers.

The heads of department agreed in some respects with this, but as we’ve already seen there were mixed ideas about the nature of delegation, or fundamentally its presence. HOD No 2 called distributed leadership an: “intelligent use of delegation”. Others appear to have maintained the different forms of delegation. HOD No 1 said that delegation was: “simply offloading jobs”, which is clearly in line with the “direct delegation” described by SMT No 1; though it is obvious here that HOD No 2, like SMT No 3, did not agree that distributed leadership entailed a duality of types of delegation. It is very interesting that SMT No 1 maintained that distributed leadership was all about

staff using initiative, but *nowhere else* did heads of department demark this as an important, or even present, feature of distributed leadership and school improvement, though certainly they did see it in their departments.

Only SMT No 3 stated that distributed leadership would cause a “flattening” of the hierarchy, but the concepts of SMT No 1 and SMT No 2 entailed this also, making it the main implicit structural congruency. On this point there was some agreement with the views of the heads of department. HOD No 8 had maintained that distributed leadership was a rejection of the: “traditional hierarchical structure”, where in an extreme form it represented a “de-layering” of the hierarchy; but for him this also entailed the pruning of middle management, which was nowhere present in the ideas of the senior management team or the other heads of department for that matter. In this respect this structural change was the major point of agreement amongst staff interviewed.

### **Importance of Distributed Leadership**

As to the importance attached to distributed leadership, the senior management team were largely in agreement with each other. SMT No 1 and SMT No 3 both focused on the impossibility of micromanagement in a big organisation like a school, since there are too many staff to directly delegate tasks to. As such, for SMT No 1, distributed leadership was a necessity.

SMT No 1 made an interesting conceptual point in elaborating, focusing on a distinction between tasks set by the senior management team, and the roles

distributed by the senior management team. This was a recurring theme of SMT No 1's comments as we will see.

However, only SMT No 2 examined the importance of distributed leadership from the perspective of the staff, not just the senior management team. They viewed it as a positive thing when staff as a group are being independent in their approach and understanding of challenges, when they appreciate the contingencies of a situation and take a tailor-made initiative to solve such challenges. What was clearly important here was the professional awareness that distributed leadership stimulates in staff – their enhanced skills of initiative being a major professional development, not to mention an asset to school improvement. Implicit in these comments also was the same reverence for shared ownership, empowerment, and the positive effects this has on morale and school improvement, which marked the comments of the heads of department.

The question to address at this point is, how far did this correlate with the reality? When asked about how far distributed leadership was utilised in their links with heads of department, answers were very revealing about the limits of distributed leadership at the point of interview. SMT No 3 stressed the importance of autonomy for leaders. Support the leader with advice by all means, but do not interfere with them, especially after they make mistakes. "It's not a question of giving them the autonomy and then taking it back as soon as they do something you don't like." But in reality, on the grounds that "they don't have the necessary leadership qualities", distributed leadership was largely curtailed in SMT No 3's oversight of a department.

As to why this was done, we can refer to SMT No 3's more positive analysis of other departments. They "have very firm ideas about how to take their departments forward". These trusted heads of department frequently "inform upwards", about progress and ideas for more progress, as well as asking for advice with problems. Silence was very ominous in the link between head of department and deputy headteacher. Clearly, despite a theoretical commitment to giving staff the trust to operate distributed leadership, SMT No 3 felt unable to trust a certain department. They candidly admitted that: "I don't think I'm very good at distributed leadership to a certain extent. I like to have my fingers in the pie still." Ultimately SMT No 3 was willing to trust some heads of department over others through an assessment of their competency as leaders: "It's the personalities that enable me to do it [distributed leadership]." Clearly distributed leadership has limits in this senior management team link.

To be fair to SMT No 3 it is easy to understand why, in certain circumstances, the senior management team needs to step in to reassert direction and leadership – and many of the heads of department gladly admitted that their autonomy of action was justifiably restricted by their competency (in the words of HOD No 6, help is needed when "things go belly up".) However, clearly there was a mistranslation of theory to practice here – a lack of trust, and/or a lack of genuine competence on the part of at least one head of department prevented the absolute application of distributed leadership. At least the example of the science departments points to the circumstances in which it can flourish. This is interesting as it demonstrates the limited application of

distributed leadership in some contexts at x school when relating this observation to the literature and the need for trust (Fullan, 2001; Harris, 2003).

Both SMT No 1 and SMT No 2 also candidly admitted that distributed leadership was a work in progress in the school. They cited other positive examples to go alongside the heads of science. SMT No 2 pointed to the heads of year, who have been “pushing forward” on their own initiative, like targeting uniform. SMT No 1 likewise, again with the near unanimous support of the heads of department comments, maintained that heads of department have great autonomy over curriculum-related matters. But other cultural problems seem to stifle distributed leadership. They admitted that part of the problem was that they had only been present for 18 months, and staff remained uncertain of what direction SMT No 1 wanted, so were less likely to take the initiative.

SMT No 2 maintained that it was a delicate process because staff easily felt mismanaged in the sense that they felt responsibilities were being passed to them and they were left to their own devices to design a direction for those responsibilities and to implement them. It is this kind of problem which matched the perception of HOD No 1 who, as already mentioned, maintained that distributed leadership was just a cover for “simply offloading jobs”. SMT No 1 explained this neatly: “They [the heads of department] don’t try as much distributed leadership and tend to delegate upwards on things they find difficult or outside their comfort zone.” Through lack of training, heads of department were uncomfortable doing much distributed leadership as regards school improvement, simply feeling overwhelmed and under-qualified. SMT

No 1 did maintain this was getting better. It was a case of walking the HODs through the processes of things like budgeting, resource acquisition and so on, so they felt comfortable doing something previously off their radar. What underscores all these comments is a strong sense that distributed leadership was not being communicated effectively to heads of department both as a concept and as a readily practicable model of leadership.

It was very interesting to note the perception of the headteacher as to how far distributed leadership was used by the rest of the senior management team with their heads of department and otherwise. SMT No 1 admitted it was a tricky thing to judge. As regards distributed leadership on the academic side, it seemed to be being implemented across the board, and the senior management team seemed to be happy with the system. However, as regards school improvement, SMT No 1 admitted: "I'm not so certain." Both SMT No 2 and SMT No 3 felt that SMT No 1 encouraged the use of distributed leadership amongst the senior management team and heads of department by extension. SMT No 2 maintained that SMT No 1, as already discussed above, would lead roles in their infancy in order to train the senior management team, and then empower them by handing over responsibility to them. Such was the case with child protection, which was first led by SMT No 1. SMT No 2 felt responsibility for roles he had previously not been heavily involved with, and was doing more collaborative work with parents, outside agencies, Governors and so on. In fact both SMT No 2 and SMT No 3 maintained that SMT No 1 was giving them more responsibilities than his

predecessor. By using distributed leadership more, SMT No 1 was encouraging it.

However, SMT No 2 stopped short of saying that SMT No 1 had helped the senior management team foster distributed leadership down the hierarchy, because SMT No 2 was already aware of the philosophy and had implemented it downwards before SMT No 1 had arrived at the school. In this sense, the novel aspect for SMT No 2 was that under SMT No 1 he had had distributed leadership from above, whereas previously SMT No 2 had only given it below. SMT No 3 maintained the same thing: "I'm not certain that the relationship with the headteacher to deputy has any effect on how I treat my departments." They maintained it was more a question of personal competence amongst the heads of department as to how far distributed leadership had been implemented.

### **Limited use of Distributed Leadership**

The senior management team highlighted other areas in which distributed leadership was limited, particularly regarding inconsistencies across the heads of department in terms of the interaction below them with their teams. All unsurprisingly pointed to a spectrum of competency. SMT No 1 maintained that the best heads of department: "get on with it", but others felt very uncomfortable about implementing distributed leadership with their teams: "They want to teach to the curriculum but nothing else." SMT No 3 also maintained that it was a cultural problem which undermined distributed leadership in the school. They maintained that some staff had an: "if it's not

broke, don't fix it" attitude. In this equation, hostility to change (represented by distributed leadership) comes from complacency – the assumption that, because things were very good as they stood, change was not an attractive possibility, even if the unknown could bring potentially better results. In these senses it seems clear that there was a perception of an inconsistency in culture amongst the heads of department.

SMT No 2 said a similar thing in terms of structure. Some departments were led by very effective communicators, having regular formal and informal feedback and meetings. Maths was given as an example of a hybrid of the two with weekly sit-down meetings and daily discussions over coffee – a practical necessity with such a large department. RS was given as an example of the latter, where a small department met regularly informally to discuss strategies, issues and so on. At the other end of the spectrum, an effective structure to communicate and actualise distributed leadership was hampered by heads of department distracted by personal matters or heads of department who had simply failed to implement an effective communication system (Harris, 2013; Bush, 2013; Bush and Glover, 2014). SMT No 3 also made the point that the communication strategies of distributed leadership could be tailored to different departments – diverse ones like MFL, or small ones like RS.

As to potential for improvements to distributed leadership in the school, SMT No 1 and SMT No 2 were optimistic about the possibility of improvement. Both were aware of the issue of staff receptivity to the concept, but whilst SMT No 1 was more concerned with the realpolitik of likely future change, SMT No 2

remained focused on staff sensitivities. SMT No 1 identified a group of staff who were hostile to change and to the distributed leadership model. They hoped that staff turnover would see that group whittle away in strength and numbers, whilst those who were content with the model and change would come to populate middle management.

This perceived institutional opposition was partly manifest in the comments of some heads of department who were either dubious of distributed leadership or were very content with their current responsibilities or with the current direction of the school. The response of SMT No 1 was in sharp contrast with that of SMT No 2 on this point. SMT No 1 went so far as to hint that the opposition would be replaced if they proved irreconcilable to the changes, or would move on of their own accord. SMT No 2 placed a greater emphasis on the sensitive management of change just as much as the change itself. They maintained it had to be made more attractive, especially to members of staff who had been present for a long time, and especially since all members of staff always complained that they have no time. SMT No 2 gave no explicit comments on how this was to be achieved, but the approach of persuasion rather than a form of coercion clearly separated their hypothetical strategies.

SMT No 3 was much more fatalistic about the chances of enhancing distributed leadership. They argued that the school is an: “old independent school model”, with lots of self-employed professionals who viewed themselves as individuals, not as part of a communitarian vision. This was strikingly in line with the comments of HOD No 9, that staff needed to view the school as a business in terms of collaborating to carve a niche in the local

community, to make it attractive for applicants. This was in turn in line with SMT No 3's views on the structural changes which would need to be made.

SMT No 3 rhetorically asked why there were heads of department rather than "subject leaders" (a comparison with the state sector again in line with HOD No 9). Heads of department, thought SMT No 3, have very narrow views, being essentially managers of budgets and insurers of effective teaching. Subject leaders in contrast are: "more about the whole school and the whole person and developing people as well as everything else". It was this that fed into a fatalistic concern: "I'm not certain that there's the capacity at the moment to pull that [distributed leadership] off." To effect change, much more serious cultural changes than outlined by SMT No 2 would be necessary, and significantly structural change would be needed, something unconsidered by SMT No 1.

The data collected from the senior management team is very illuminating and interesting, particularly when one considers the fact that the impact of leadership on student outcomes has been shown to be considerably greater than previously believed, especially where leaders engage directly with teachers to develop classroom practice (Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007; Bush et al., 2009). Leadership can be devoid of formal position and can rely upon an influence process as well as residing in teams and groups, not just individuals. Bush et al. (2009) point out that a greater "purchase" is possible if leadership involves the many rather than the few. Harris (2009, 2013) argues that distributed leadership can make a significant contribution to

organisational growth, success and student achievement. These findings and observations seem to be missing at my case study school.

Let us now turn to the conclusions and recommendations in the knowledge that both the statistical and written data demonstrate that distributed leadership is neither very present in the school nor understood well as a concept.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

This thesis has provided an analysis of the concept and theory of distributed leadership as well as how it manifests itself at x school both in theory and practice. It has also provided an explanation of the link between distributed leadership and school improvement at x school. In particular, the case study set out to investigate and research how distributed leadership could enhance school improvement within x school.

Uniquely, x school is an independent school as well as a high performing school where the theory and concept of distributed leadership is not that well understood nor indeed prevalent, when compared with the state sector as exemplified by the literature. Indeed, existing research surrounding distributed leadership in the independent sector is at best limited. As a result, this research is an attempt to provide a more holistic approach to distributed leadership in the independent sector; and, in fact, this case study has demonstrated that the concept of distributed leadership is transferrable to the Independent sector. However, the independent sector is behind the state sector by quite some way in this area. This case study goes some way to extending the concept of distributed leadership into the independent sector.

This research has highlighted that the concept of distributed leadership has evolved over time (Harris, 2013; Bush, 2013) and has come to be viewed as the preferred leadership model at present (Bush, 2013). Gronn (2000) was one of the first researchers to advance the notion of distributed leadership as an alternative theory to a broader set of ideas pertaining to leadership theory.

Since 2000 the concept of distributed leadership has been further developed and there have been misconceptions surrounding it (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2004).

In sum, distributed leadership was not a concept uniformly understood and implemented at the case study school. This is in direct contrast to the evidence in the literature which states that distributed leadership is the in-fashion educational leadership theory at present (Bush et al., 2009 and 2013; Harris, 2013). There were some striking disparities in the way the senior management team and heads of department conceived and used distributed leadership between and amongst themselves. These disparities typically outnumbered the points of unanimity. Where there was consensus, it only really served to demonstrate the very real limits of distributed leadership at the school. In this sense distributed leadership had very negative connotations and was seen as a bad concept – see chapter 4.

It should be noted that the investigation into distributed leadership took place in an Independent School and, whilst generalisations are not useful, from personal experience and anecdotal evidence my sense is that leaders in x school shared similar misconceptions or conceptions of distributed leadership as colleagues in other Independent Schools of similar size and reputation. The level of understanding of distributed leadership exhibited by the heads of department and senior management team was similar to that in the maintained sector (Harris, 2008; Gunter, 2001; Hargreaves and Fink, 2009). In terms of school improvement it can be seen that there is not as much pressure for distributed leadership and therefore the impact on school

improvement is reduced as x school is already a high performing school with significant academic success as exemplified by examination results, league table positioning and so on. Let us briefly recap them before coming to some recommendations as to how to extend distributed leadership at the case study school.

The strongest point of conceptual consensus was the belief that distributed leadership aimed at the articulation of a vision for the school. But beyond this was a spectrum of thought which saw, at one end, distributed leadership as merely the offloading of jobs while, at the other, an almost Foucault-style distribution of power to define roles through autonomy – see chapter 4. Equally, in terms of the theoretical concerns as to who should drive distributed leadership, there was a wide range of opinion from those who saw it as a dictatorial exercise on the part of the senior management team, and those who saw it as a joint effort, mutually debated and agreed. There was a recurring conceptual link between those who considered distributed leadership functionally the offloading of jobs and those who saw it as structurally dictatorial, just as those who saw it as a meaningful empowerment also saw it as structurally “de-layering”.

These very limited degrees of conceptual standardisation were underpinned by the frank admission of many heads of department that distributed leadership was an entirely alien term, and much of their theorising was entirely improvised. Again it appears that the case study school is falling behind current educational leadership theory, although it does go some way to demonstrate the point that the likes of Lumby (2013) make in terms of

distributed leadership being a means of making teachers work harder and have more power exerted over them – see chapter 5.

In the school itself, the presence of distributed leadership seemed equally limited in management. Heads of department felt autonomous only insofar as the senior management team allowed them purview, if not the final say, over matters of department curriculum. Many felt that they were not invited to partake in true distributed leadership, the shared decision-making which allowed all to take a stake in devising the direction for school improvement. Some members of the senior management team felt that some heads of department were not qualified for this level of leadership, even though others felt that some could, when given proper training, lead successfully beyond the departmental frontier. It was a recurring problem that heads of department felt unqualified to lead via distributed leadership, since they had only been equipped for basic management styles, often viewed as the ability to do “fire-fighting” but little else – see chapter 4. At the far end of the spectrum some heads of department and parts of the senior management team agreed that some members of staff were not only unable but fundamentally unwilling to partake in distributed leadership. Such a reactionary group may have whittled away through natural and professional loss, but in the short term presented an immediate barrier to distributed leadership – see chapter 5.

There were some positives to be taken, however. This pro *status quo* group was in sharp contrast to a small group who, from the example of business or of the state sector, urged distributed leadership-style reform to make the school more competitive and competent. This was encouraging, but the very

small numbers were disheartening. More numerous were the rump of the heads of department who felt that distributed leadership would bring benefits to school improvement, providing better leadership and motivation for and amongst staff. Such a cultural change, many hoped, would bring slow but incremental improvement to the consensual nature of school improvement – see chapter 4.

Others felt that the structure of the school impeded the spread of distributed leadership. An institution like the joint heads of department meeting was viewed as a poor forum for distributed leadership, since it was, to some, a simple rubber-stamp for the senior management team, whilst for others it focused on departmental problems, not pan-school vision. Again there were some positives for future enhancement. Some heads of department focused on groups like those heads of department who had come together to debate the relative merits of the iGCSE, clear evidence that there was the potential for middle management to collaborate in discussing pan-departmental issues as part of school improvement – see chapter 4.

What we see clearly in these generalities are disparaging comments about the current absence of distributed leadership in the school, but degrees of optimism about the theoretical benefits and the possibility, if the culture and structure of school management changed, of implementing distributed leadership to the gain of school improvement – see chapters 4 and 5. My Research Questions were as follows:

1. What are heads of department and the senior management team perspectives on distributed leadership?
2. To what extent, if at all, do they feel the school is benefiting from distributed leadership?
3. To what extent do they feel the school is practising distributed leadership?
4. What ideas do they have for extending distributed leadership in the future?

When addressing the above questions directly I would argue the following:

1. Both groups have very similar feelings and perspectives about distributed leadership. However, as stated there is capacity to develop distributed leadership amongst both groups.
2. x school does benefit from the advantages as put forward by the theorists in a limited way. School improvement is happening but it is not all as a result of distributed leadership theory being put into practice.
3. The discrepancies are essentially that of a misconception held by both groups that distributed leadership is a form of delegation or indeed is seen as a process of offloading work to heads of department.
4. Please see the recommendations below.

## Recommendations

To make distributed leadership desirable

(1) How do we make distributed leadership not another management fad but an attractive part of the professional development of staff?

- Emphasise the empowerment element. Create an environment where Middle Leaders enjoy the autonomy to fully embrace leadership opportunities both within departments and at whole school level. This links to the work of Harris (2013), Spillane (2006) and Gronn (2009). In short, Middle Leaders will then feel a part of the broader decision-making process in contrast to the current situation at x school.
- Point to the anti-dictatorial element, emphasising the loosening of top-down prescribed methods and the responsibility and benefits of initiative taking and broadened authority. This links to the point above and will go some way to alleviate the concerns that distributed leadership is only concerned with delegation. By providing autonomy to middle leaders, senior managers at x school will also provide trust as advocated by Tschannen-Moran (2014). It will also reduce the belief in and need for solo leadership styles as outlined by Crawford (2012). In my view this case study and my experience at x school has clearly demonstrated that Middle Leaders at x school lack autonomy, trust and investment from the senior management. Through the effective deployment of distributed

leadership these issues can be addressed and middle leaders could play a vital and important role in key decision-making processes at x school.

- The type of language to be used is important; management-speak has all sorts of negative connotations ranging from deliberate obliqueness to daunting abstractions. The language of leadership should be made palatable to middle leaders so that they fully support the move to a distributed approach. Clear and effective communication, be it in head of department meetings, briefings or one-to-one meetings, should be paramount.
  - This would hopefully prevent damaging departmental rivalries, since the perspective would be shifted exclusively from the department to the school, so hopefully issues like the aggressive marketing of subjects would cease as both a symptom and a cause of the growing collaborative ethos of distributed leadership.
- (2) How do we correct the misconceptions of the middle leaders and create a unified theory common to all?
- Counter the claim that staff are not being invited to partake in the crafting and implementation of school improvement by inviting them to join working parties to provide a clear and direct channel of communication and voice (such as Reporting and Assessment), ask for their input into the planning and formulation of the School Development Plan as well as the review cycle and invite their input at regular meetings such as head of

department meetings. This is a very important point and links to the trust factor as above put forward by Tschannen-Moran (2014). It is clear that middle leaders at x school do not feel trusted by the senior management and feel they are deliberately excluded from the decision-making process especially at whole school level.

- Point to anti-dictatorial element and the genuinely consultative nature: not the offloading of jobs. Involve heads of department fully and openly in the decision-making process so that they are a part of any decisions that are made as opposed to paying lip service to consultation. This will then provide a sense of ownership and shared values. This is also extremely important as middle leaders will feel valued, trusted and an important facet in the broader elements of school improvement as advocated by the likes of Harris (2013), Bush (2013), Hopkins (2009) and Leithwood and Mascall (2008).
- Structures like the head of department meeting should not continue to be exercises in rubber-stamping by providing agendas well in advance of the meeting, having clear agenda items which provide an opportunity for open and transparent discussions to be held which will then be used to formulate strategic planning and thus inform the decision-making process.
- Point to the ways it is already present in essence and how it will then be expanded. For example, the autonomy of heads of department in their departments will be expanded to new responsibilities with regard to whole

school improvement. This will help to explain both the familiarity of the concept and the proposed mechanics of operation.

- Retrain staff – given that many feel unqualified. The reforming example of the good state schools was cited, as was the negative example of Independent Schools, so why not visit both to give an idea of what was wanted and what was not. In this way best practice can be shared and a model of distributed leadership can be formulated at x school. Leadership can then be created from the middle as opposed to simply from the top. Again this will eradicate the notions of solo leadership to a more distributed model as put forward by Crawford (2012) and a more hybrid model as advocated by Gronn (2009).

### **To make distributed leadership implementable**

- Superior lines of communication need to be created between different levels of management by using staff briefings and briefing notes that are shared openly and engender all voices to be heard and listened to. Meeting agendas need to be published in advance, and the meetings should enable full and open discussions to be held, with minutes taken and published so that all points of view are garnered. This is distinctly opposite to what occurs now at x school.
- A working party should be established which includes members of the senior management team, heads of department and main scale teaching staff to oversee professional development. In turn this should then allow

the identification of strengths of staff and then the application of those strengths to engender school improvement.

- Address the common problem that staff feel that they do not have the time or space to do new responsibilities justice by looking at timetable allocations, the INSET training programme and time gained when examination classes are no longer in school, to create a dedicated amount of time and space in order for effective planning and use of time so that any new responsibility could be given appropriate attention.
- Address the issue of building relational trust as advanced by Tschannen-Moran (2014) so that distributed leadership is real to all and does not become relegated to being viewed as simple delegation by another name. This is very important and crucial to the success of distributed leadership at x school.

It is clear that schools exist in an age of increased and significant accountability and increasingly more focused measures of performance. This puts increasing demands upon school leaders. Harris (2013) argues that distributed leadership alone does not create better performing schools and it is not a panacea for success. Likewise, it does not have good or bad qualities within it as a theory or concept. The key for Harris (2008 and 2013), Tschannen-Moran (2014), Bush and Glover (2014) and Gunter, Hall and Bragg (2013) – and I strongly agree with their argument – is that what matters most is how leadership is distributed and the motives behind it.

Hargreaves (2011) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that distributed leadership has an important role to play in developing school improvement and indeed in raising standards in schools on a broader level. If distributed leadership is to have any impact, then those school leaders in formal leadership positions like the senior management team at my case study school will have a major and integral role to play in making it happen: for example, by clearly explaining and championing distributed leadership as a concept and theory and demonstrating how it can be implemented and utilised in x school at whole school level. This could be done via establishing a working party of volunteers, piloting the concept across a small number of departments in the first instance over a specific time frame including providing training and support, reviewing the progress made and then expanding it across more departments and ultimately the whole school.

This is something that I have reflected upon in my own Headship over the last four years. The points put forward by Tschannen-Moran (2014) on trust in general and being a trustworthy leader in particular resonate very clearly with my experiences of leadership. It is far better and more effective for a school if the senior leaders and especially the headteacher empower their staff with autonomy and trust, enable them to play a full part in decision-making and provide the support necessary for them to fulfil their role in the school. Creating a shared vision, avoiding the blame game and respecting one's team are vital components of effective distributed leadership in my experience. These factors are absent at x school and the senior management team found it difficult to grasp the concepts of trust and autonomy as part of distributed

leadership as they did not understand the implications of them upon middle leaders.

Delegation is not distributed leadership and will not bring about school improvement in the fullest sense of the phrase on its own. Distributed leadership has to have at its heart trust, autonomy of staff to contribute to whole school improvement, the ability of staff to make decisions and be an important facet in the decision-making process, investment in staff in terms of professional development and time to be able to do their job. Perhaps most importantly, distributed leadership needs school leaders to understand and embrace it so that as a concept and in real terms it is put into action effectively. Thus the concept of distributed leadership in practice is valuable but flawed if not executed effectively.

A good starting point in x school would be to ask for volunteers from the members of the Focus group I established whilst carrying out the research for this thesis.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Statement of research intent**

Dear

As you are aware, I am currently working towards a Doctorate in Education (EdD) at Warwick University and my research focuses upon: distributed leadership at Middle Management level and how it links to school improvement.

As we have already discussed, you have kindly agreed to allow me to discuss this with you on ..... at ..... in ..... Our discussion should last no more than ..... minutes and will be digitally recorded to enable future transcription.

The conversation will focus upon your perceptions and understanding of distributed leadership in theory and practice as well as how it can enhance school improvement.

I will be asking for your thoughts on the following areas:

- How far if at all do HODs and the SMT HOD link exhibit distributed leadership?
- Are there any discrepancies between distributed leadership in theory and practice?

- What suggestions do you have in order to enhance distributed leadership in order to realise greater school improvement?

The interview transcript will be forwarded to you for approval prior to data analysis, and you may correct any inaccuracies as you wish. You may also advise me if you feel that you need to withdraw a response or the whole interview after it has taken place.

The transcript, data analysis and thesis will make no reference to your identity and any statements you have made will be disseminated through the research. All data will be held securely and confidentially in accordance with standard practice in educational research under the guidance of the University of Warwick ethics committee. Please note that this research is purely for my University of Warwick course and is separate to my normal working role.

Thank you for your assistance and I look forward to talking to you.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Bird

**Research Title: Examining middle management perspectives on distributed leadership: a case study of an independent school.**

I have read and understood the statement of research intent.

I agree to being interviewed (or participating in a focus group) on date (.....).

I also agree to be digitally recorded.

I understand that the interview transcript will be forwarded to me for approval prior to analysis, and I may correct any inaccuracies as I wish.

I may also advise you if I feel that I need to withdraw a response or the whole interview after it has taken place.

I understand that the transcript, data analysis and thesis will make no reference to my identity and any statements I have made will be disseminated through the research.

I know that all data will be held securely and confidentially in accordance with standard practice in educational research under the guidance of the University of Warwick ethics committee.

I understand that the research is purely for the purposes of a research degree at the University of Warwick and is separate from normal working roles.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: Simon Bird

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2**

### **Data collection for EdD**

#### **Focus group**

- To consist of 5 HODs – 3 male & 2 female
- Range of gender, age & experience, large, medium and small sized departments, other school experience
- Prompts to include understanding of the term distributed leadership, experience of it in action, is it in action here both perception and reality, would like more or less, proposals to enhance DL to raise school improvement – how why how long to raise school improvement, discrepancies

#### **Interviews**

- To be semi-structured
- To be with SMT x3 and HODs x 10 – split of age, gender, experience etc

#### **Questions for HODs**

1. What do you understand by the term distributed leadership? (DL or delegation?)
2. Do you feel you have autonomy/freedom as a Leader? (How? Why not?)
3. Do you feel you have ownership of Leadership? (How? Why? Why not?)
4. Do you see yourself as a Leader or Manager or both?

5. What benefits could you see to enhancing your distributed leadership role for the wider gain?
6. Are there links between distributed leadership and school improvement? (How? Why?)
7. Have you any ideas as to how distributed leadership could be enhanced so as to raise school improvement?

### **Questions for SMT**

1. What do you understand by the term distributed leadership? (DL or delegation?)
2. What importance do you attach to distributed leadership?
3. How far do you employ distributed leadership with your HOD link? (How? Why?)
4. Do we have the capacity for enhancing distributed leadership? (How?)
5. Can you see any discrepancies with distributed leadership across the HODs?
6. Do you see a divide between a Leader and a Manager?
7. What perception does the HM have of distributed leadership across SMT and HODs?
8. Do the deputy heads believe they get distributed leadership from the head and do they then encourage distributed leadership to their HODs?

## Questionnaire to HODs

(Scale Questions of 1 to 5: 1 = totally agree; 2 = partially agree;  
3 = neither agree or disagree; 4 = partially disagree; 5 = totally disagree)

1. SMT encourage Leadership in my role as HOD
2. Leadership and Management are different things
3. I understand the difference between Leadership and Management
4. I see my role as HOD mainly as a Managerial one
5. I see my role as HOD mainly as a Leadership one
6. I see my role as HOD as evenly balancing both Leadership and Managerial roles
7. The culture of the school is conducive to promoting Leadership at HOD level
8. Leadership is a positive thing at HOD level
9. Leadership at HOD level can lead to school improvement
10. Developing Leadership at HOD level will enhance school improvement
11. Leadership at HOD level provides ownership of school aims
12. Are you familiar with the current and ongoing educational debate about distributed leadership? Yes/No (Please delete as appropriate). If Yes, what do you understand by the term distributed leadership?