THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

An investigation into the leadership of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools

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by

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Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

The investigation is based on the premise that there is a need to create primary schools whose success can be sustained long term. It is thought that creating such schools would be of direct benefit to pupils, schools, the education system and society. Education has been a major priority of the government since 1997: it has invested significantly in schools in the expectation that standards would continuously improve. Short term actions to raise standards and improve performance in primary schools are both necessary and valuable. However by themselves they are inadequate. They need to be supported by a more strategic and sustainable approach. To ensure sustainability of success, schools need a dual commitment to the short term and the long term. Crucial to a school's sustainable success is the effective leadership of the headteacher and leadership within the school at all levels. In particular it is the quality of the strategic dimension of the headteacher's leadership, what strategic capacities he or she models and how they are developed in leaders at all levels. The investigation focuses on the headteachers of successful primary schools and is essentially about leadership and how it impacts upon success. It is assumed that success is the desired outcome for all schools and government, although the criteria for success may vary considerably. While there is much common ground between 'sustainability' and 'strategy', it is perceived that sustainability is the continuous and long term goal and strategy is a means of achieving it. The rest of this introductory chapter discusses the rationale and context for the study and gives an outline of the literature review, including key terms and arguments, the key research questions and an outline of the research methodology.

Primary schools in the first decade of the 21st century have to operate in a turbulent environment. They are bombarded with initiative after initiative involving change which can be complex, messy, fast paced and relentless (Fullan, 2004). Some school staff, including headteachers, find the process painful and the pressure too great and are unable or unwilling to adapt, resulting in a workforce tired or lost to the profession (Hargreaves, 2005). Government increasingly calls schools to account, expects immediate results and will close inadequate schools that cannot be turned around quickly (OFSTED, 2005). In such a climate, it is so easy for primary schools to get bogged down in short term reactions, to adopt quick fixes and to search for transferable blueprints.

The government's laudable drive to raise standards witnessed significant and impressive gains for five years in literacy and numeracy attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 but then experienced a stubborn levelling off. Despite small upturns in the last four years (2004-2007), results are still

considerably short of government targets. This plateau in results has led to a realisation that the large scale National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy, dominated by micro management and short term actions, have gone as far as they can. The strategies themselves have undergone considerable change and a Renewed Framework for Literacy and Mathematics (DfES, 2006a) has been introduced into primary schools in 2007 in an attempt to improve results by 'a strategic leap' (Davies, 2003), rather than small increments. The government's Primary Strategy "Excellence and Enjoyment" (DfES, 2003) advocates schools achieving high standards in literacy and numeracy in the context of a broad, balanced and enriched curriculum. Schools' take up of increased flexibility and ownership, or the strategy's impact on standards are still not clear but this small scale research may offer some insight into that.

It is against this backcloth that the investigation into how primary schools can be created, whose success can be sustained long term, is set. It is hoped that this small scale research will add to existing knowledge about strategic leadership in primary schools and throw light on how building strategic capacity may provide a powerful solution to sustainability. At a micro level, the research is professionally meaningful to the researcher as an experienced headteacher of a large primary school, and to other headteachers, all constantly under government pressure to 'raise the bar'. It is expected that research findings will contribute to the knowledge about the sustained raising of standards. At a macro level, this is very relevant to government policy makers as well as schools at an individual level. Given descriptions of headteachers leaving the profession because "reservoirs of hope" have run dry (Flintham, 2003) and the difficulty of recruitment (Howson, 2002, Shaw, 2006) the small scale research is also relevant to policy makers in that it may indicate from successful practice in schools how to nurture leadership at all levels and provide the kind of future leaders needed for sustainability (Fullan, 2005).

The literature review draws together existing knowledge from the educational world and to some extent the business world in three fields – leadership, strategy and school effectiveness and improvement. To different stakeholders and accountability bodies in the school system, the criteria for success can vary considerably and this is explored concisely. Leadership is a highly contested concept so there is considerable discussion about models of leadership and what is meant by leadership in order to gain a working understanding. Similarly sustainability, a new concept as it relates to an educational context, and its perceived elements are critically appraised. Strategy is an established concept in the business world and is defined along with several other key terms from educational and business contexts in alphabetical order. 'Capacity' and 'capability' have different

meanings in the educational literature to the business literature and this differentiation is highlighted in the literature review. However, for the purpose of this research, capacity is used at all times.

'Absorptive capacity' is the ability to absorb new knowledge and understanding (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001) and learn smartly (Perkins, 2003).

'Adaptive capacity' is the capacity to adapt to change (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001, Fullan, 2004).

'Contextual wisdom' is the capacity to see the school in relationship to the wider community and the educational world in which it belongs (Davies, B.J., 2004).

'Historical understanding' is a perspective leaders need, alongside futures orientation, for strategic thinking (Garratt, 1995). It is a pre-requisite for sustainable development which respects, protects, preserves and renews all that is valuable in the past and learns from it in order to build a better future (Hargreaves, 2005).

'Leadership' is essentially providing direction and exercising influence over the people and the organisation to achieve shared goals (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).

'People wisdom' is the capacity to understand what motivates people and how to work co-operatively with them (Davies, B.J., 2004).

'Procedural wisdom' is the capacity to make the right choice of strategic approach and strategic processes (Davies, B.J., 2004).

'Strategic abandonment' requires intuition and discernment to choose the optimum time to give up successful activities in favour of more promising, potentially better approaches (Drucker, 1999, Caldwell, 2004).

'Strategic approaches' are classified by Boisot (1995) into strategic planning, emergent strategy, intrapreneurship or decentralised strategy and strategic intent.

'Strategic conversations' are dialogue about whole school issues and trends that face the school over the next few years as well as the shorter term operational issues (Van der Heijden, 1996, Davies, B., 2003).

'Strategic leadership' is not a model or type of leadership; it is a dimension or element of the broader leadership role (Davies, B. and Davies, B.J., 2004).

'Strategic processes' are engaging in reflection and analysis, using strategic conversations to build a common language and to articulate the strategy (Davies, B. and Davies, B.J., 2004).

'Strategic timing' is about having 'the finger on the pulse' (Pedlar, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1986). It is the capacity to take the right action at the right time and seize the opportunity when it arises (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001).

'Strategy' encompasses direction setting, takes a broader view of major dimensions of the organisation and deals with the medium to long term as well as the short term. It is both a perspective to view the future and a template against which to evaluate current actions (Davies, B., 2003, 2004).

'Success' is the accomplishment of an aim or a favourable outcome (Oxford Dictionary).

'Sustainability' is the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement in learning, consistent with deep values of human purpose (Fullan, 2005).

The key arguments of the thesis are what successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools might look like, why they are relevant and desirable and how they can be achieved. The thesis proposes that successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools recognise the need to achieve good results in the short term and respond to the government's accountability climate of league tables and OFSTED inspections. However in having high expectations and wanting the best for their children, they resist teaching exclusively to Key Stage 2 National Tests. Instead they provide a broad, balanced and enriched curriculum, which promotes deep and lifelong learning and values thinking and understanding. They achieve good results over time. Successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools also value the development of the whole child and embrace the "Every Child Matters" agenda (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk) genuinely. They consider children's

interest and motivation, engage them in their learning and sustain positive attitudes. At the same time, they recognise the importance of the sustained contribution of staff in raising standards and nurture their well-being and professional development.

Children need to be equipped with skills appropriate to life and work in the 21st century. Long term they need to become responsible for their own learning and see learning as a lifelong process. Staff have to be committed, motivated and professional but also contented. They need to achieve job satisfaction and work/life balance to avoid burn out and a wish to leave teaching. Teachers need nurturing to aspire to leadership; they need to see leadership as workable, achievable and rewarding so that future leaders can be recruited and retained for the system. The thesis proposes that successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools would make a considerable contribution to realising these relevant and desirable visions for both children and staff.

Crucial to the creation of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools is effective leadership. This is the leadership of the headteacher and leadership at all levels. The quality of the strategic leadership of the headteacher and building the school's strategic capacity are critical elements in achieving success and sustaining it over time. By focusing on strategic, sustainable processes and approaches, these schools involve staff and other stakeholders in strategic thinking and the prioritising of intents, and provide an effective tool for successfully driving school improvement and leadership learning. They invest in people and develop leadership capacity at all levels to sustain success and produce future leaders. They make use of strategic abandonment and timing as a survival mechanism and as a useful tool in self-evaluation for reducing workload, insuring against initiatives overload and achieving work/life balance.

To investigate successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools, the small scale research needs to focus on five key questions:

1. How do primary headteachers define their success?
2. What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'?
3. How do primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable?
4. How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term?
5. What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?

The primary school headteacher has been identified as having a pivotal role as all five research questions revolve around his/her leadership. To answer these questions, rich and illuminative data needs to be collected, in order to examine in depth the complexity of headteachers' leadership. The research approach is qualitative as this provides the most appropriate fit for holistic understanding in depth and detail. The research design is a case study, focusing on a single case, a school. The semi-structured interview has been selected as the most appropriate research method for collating the qualitative data from primary headteachers and an interview guide, offering structure and flexibility, has been designed and is open to review and refinement during the research process. The sample of serving headteachers of successful primary schools is drawn from the north-east region of England and has been selected from publicly available data on school performance and peer recommendation. Data collected will be analysed, coded and then interpreted. The research is small scale and constrained by limited resources: subsequent findings need to be interpreted carefully and treated with caution.

Following this introductory chapter, there are four more. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature, examining what is meant by success, the centrality of leadership to a school's sustainable success, sustainability and its constituents and strategy and strategic processes and approaches. Chapter Three deals with the research methodology, discussing and justifying the research approach, design and method, the data collection and analysis and the concepts of reliability and validity. Chapter Four reports and discusses the findings related to each of the five key research questions. Finally Chapter Five presents the conclusion, outlining the principal features of the investigation and evaluating its strengths and weaknesses, before summarising the main findings around each of the five research questions and related to previous research, examining the implications of the research for professionals, government policy makers and the research field and suggesting a revised model of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Literature Review

The literature review on the leadership of successful, strategic, sustainable primary schools draws together existing knowledge from the educational world and to a small extent the business world in three fields – leadership, strategy and school effectiveness and improvement. The structure of the review is largely self-selecting and falls naturally into sections on leadership, success, sustainability and strategy. The thesis is fundamentally about leadership and as such it permeates all chapters and sections. In the literature review, a large section has been devoted to the centrality of leadership to a school's sustainable success and covering what has been termed 'total leadership' (Leithwood et al, 2006) – leadership at all levels in the school and the vital contribution of the headteacher. Success is assumed to be the desired aim of all schools and this brief section has been placed first in order to frame the discussion about leadership, sustainability and strategy. There is much common ground between 'sustainability' and 'strategy', but the thesis views their essential interrelationship as sustainability being the continuous and long term goal and strategy a means of achieving it. Of course it has to be remembered that these four sections are certainly not discrete; they are interconnected with cross references and links on many occasions.

1.   What is meant by success?
2.   Centrality of leadership to a school's sustainable success
3.   Sustainability and its constituents
4.   Strategy and strategic processes and approaches.

In the first section of the literature review, the notion of success in contemporary primary schools in England is examined. Because of the volume of research on school effectiveness, this section could have been extensive. However it has been deliberately and consciously kept brief. Its purpose is to set into context the research on leading successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools. The official view of success, as driven by government, across the system and at school level, is defined and questioned and a suggestion is made that there may be a ceiling to Key Stage 2 results. As an alternative view, great value is placed on a much broader concept of success, in the short term and long term, as a basis for building theory about strategic and sustainable primary schools.

In the second section of the literature review, the case is argued that total leadership – not just that of the headteacher but also leadership at all levels throughout the school – is central to a primary school's sustainable success. Attempting to integrate research findings on educational leadership

and drawing on several theoretical models and two official models of school leadership, questions are raised about what is effective or successful leadership, how and what it impacts upon and whether it can be transferred from one context to another. The OFSTED model of 'good leadership' is rejected as narrow and inadequate and it is concluded that leadership makes a direct and indirect difference to both the educational outcomes for pupils and to the leadership capacity of all adults in the organisation. The contribution of the headteacher to a primary school's strategic and sustainable success is examined in detail. In the context of a predicted leadership recruitment crisis, the thesis pinpoints a phenomenon which is paradoxical: despite the complexity, responsibility and stress, some headteachers find the job highly satisfying. The significance of the headteacher's strategic leadership is highlighted; it is needed for a school's sustainable success and as a model for other leaders in the organisation. The research literature is analysed to draw out the actions, characteristics and personal qualities of strategic leaders which impact on the performance of both children and staff. The thesis highlights the headteacher's strategic wisdom to balance the competing demands of various stakeholders and suggests that succession planning should be an integral part of strategy.

In the third section of the literature review, the thesis attempts to define sustainability, to analyse what it consists of and why it is an important goal for primary schools, and to show how it links to educational leadership. It highlights the importance to sustainability of treating staff as professionals, investing in their professional development, building their leadership capacity and guarding against 'burn out' and demoralisation. In discussing what sustainability consists of, it acknowledges that current analyses may not be exhaustive and that it is too soon to assess the impact of perceived elements or factors of sustainability on a school's success. However, despite these reservations, there appears to be some consensus that total leadership (that of the headteacher and leadership at different levels throughout the school), deep learning, moral purpose, balancing the short term and the long term and collaboration, rather than competition, are major influences on creating a successful, sustainable school.

In the fourth section of the literature review, the thesis examines how the widely used term 'strategy' has been applied to educational leadership and its relevance and significance to sustainability. 'Strategy' and 'strategic planning' are differentiated and the importance of strategic thinking in forming and articulating the strategy is stressed. The thesis outlines key strategic processes and approaches and how they link to investing in people to achieve success in both the short term and long term but it is demonstrated, through an example, that translating strategy into

action should not be underestimated. Finally in this section, it is suggested that strategic abandonment, as yet an underdeveloped capacity, promises to be a useful tool for sustainability in setting priorities, resisting initiatives and reducing workload. From practice, four kinds of strategic abandonment are identified but the thesis warns that the term 'abandonment' itself may be negatively perceived by practitioners.

2.1   <u>What is meant by success?</u>

Arguably all stakeholders in the school system – staff, parents, pupils, governors, the local authority, central government – want schools to be successful. However to different stakeholders and accountability bodies, the criteria for success can vary considerably. The Oxford dictionary defines success as "the accomplishment of an aim" or "a favourable outcome". Government's aim is virtuous in that it wants to raise standards. All other stakeholders would be in unanimous agreement with this. However concern and disagreement may occur over the ways and means of achieving that aim and the measurement of success. Government places huge value on test results, league tables and external accountability via The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Schools throughout the system are under considerable pressure to fulfil the government's agenda. As a result, government may be over emphasising competition and short term outputs and losing sight of deep and lifelong learning strategies which promote sustainability (Tymms and Merrell, 2007).

Motivated by political expedients, government may unknowingly be drawing schools into a cycle of short term reactions and teaching to the test. Social, spiritual, physical and emotional development may be sacrificed at the expense of academic attainment. Given the pressure of a high stakes accountability culture, it is not surprising that primary schools coach children for the national tests in Maths, English and Science in May and put in enormous effort every year to boost results. Strongest teachers are placed in Year 6 and a 'fast finish' is expected in the push from the end of Year 5. On the surface, primary schools can get good results as a consequence of teaching to the test and narrowing the curriculum. As such they appear to be successful but probe more deeply and standards on closer analysis seem to be about knowledge replication, rather than understanding (Davies, B. 2006). This approach is inadequate in the long term as deeper learning is needed to go to higher levels of performance.

Nationally the drive to raise standards witnessed significant and impressive gains for 5 years at the end of Key Stage 2 and then experienced a stubborn levelling off (Fullan, 2004). A small upturn in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 still leaves Key Stage 2 results considerably short of original government targets. An ever increasing intensity on teaching to the tests will not raise standards further but could instead result in 'burn out' for pupils and teachers. Government and teachers may have to accept that there is only so much an education system can do alone (Silcock and Brundett, 2002) and that standards have reached an optimum point – some years it may be higher but some

years lower – and redefine their criteria for success. Critics of schools, including OFSTED, may seize on this acceptance as an excuse for complacency and low expectations. On the contrary it is offered as an honest and realistic viewpoint by the researcher, in his capacity as an experienced primary headteacher, on redefining the direction primary schools should take for sustainability.

Underpinning this redirection are alternative measures of success, many of which complement the standards framework. Davies B. (2006) indicates that a sustainable school would have established strategic measures of success and would have accepted the challenge of measuring what is of value rather than valuing what is more easily measured.

"It is important to see success not just as measured by test and examination results but as a wider set of features that encompass the school's values and the way individuals live out these values in their day-to-day interactions"

(Davies, B. 2006, p13)

If it is accepted that being effective equates to being successful, then strategic measures of success resonate with key characteristics of primary schools in the extensive research on school effectiveness (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995, James et al, 2006).

In summary for the purposes of this thesis, success is most definitely about raising standards. This is both in the short term – and therefore meeting the requirements of Section 5 OFSTED inspections – but also in the long term, rising strategically above the short term expedient, to sustain good standards over time. However success in a primary school is more than this: it is also about a much broader perspective of achievement which for sustainability includes standards in all areas of school life – the attitude, enjoyment and fulfilment of children; the high level of staff commitment and engagement, staff morale and job satisfaction; the headteacher's leadership and leadership throughout the school; the ethos of the school; and finally the school's standing in the community (Englefield, 2001).

2. 2 **Centrality of leadership to a school's sustainable success**

In attempting to define what is meant by success in English primary schools, the thesis has suggested that one strategic measure of success would be the effectiveness of leadership. This is the leadership contribution of the headteacher but also the leadership from school staff at all levels. Leadership is an important factor in itself but its significance lies in evaluating how it impacts and makes a difference to the other measures of success relating to standards, children, staff, ethos and community. The case being argued is that leadership is central to a school's sustainable success.

Leadership is a fundamental social, organisational and political phenomenon. In recent years in education theory, 'leadership' has superseded 'management' and 'administration' as the perceived predominant activity of headteachers. The significance of leadership in education is seen in the high profile afforded it by the Blair Labour government in the establishment of the National College for School Leadership in 2000. The original goal of the NCSL was "to have every child in a well-led school, every leader a learner" (NCSL 2003). One of its four reviewed goals is "to develop excellent school leadership to transform children's achievement and well-being" (NCSL 2006a). An international authority on educational reform believes that leadership is crucial to large-scale, sustainable reform in education.

> "It (leadership) cuts across all pieces of the change puzzle. It represents the strategy of the 21st century. We need pipelines of leadership, leadership at all levels, and opportunity for future and current leaders to learn in context".
>
> (Fullan, 2004, p22)

It would appear that there is a growing belief that leadership is central to system wide success..

At the outset it is important to point out that leadership is a highly contested concept; it can take many forms and there are various conceptions and competing definitions of leadership. Successful school leadership is somewhat difficult to distil. As a guide to exploring the argument that leadership is key to a school's sustainable success, it is worth stating two underlying assumptions about school leadership made in this thesis. Firstly, research shows that leadership has significant effects on pupil learning, second only to the combined effects of the quality of the curriculum and the quality of teaching (Leithwood et al 2006). Secondly, leadership essentially has two key functions of providing direction and exercising influence over the people and the organisation to achieve shared goals (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).

Two further points require clarification. At one time leadership and leader were perceived as the same and so leadership research tended to be restricted to the single formal leader of an organisation (Lambert, 2003). In a rapidly changing society, it is all too obvious that the formal leader's job is too big and challenging for one person (Gronn, 2003). Leadership at all levels is needed to complement the headteacher's leadership to ensure the school's sustainable success. The second point is that, while the headteacher's leadership is crucial, the notion of exceptionality, where the headteacher is expected to be a hero figure or charismatic leader, is rejected (Gronn, 2003) as it is negatively associated with sustainability (Fullan, 2004). Theoretical and 'official' models of leadership and research into educational leadership are now examined to understand how leaders through their actions, behaviour and characteristics make a difference to teaching, learning and standards.

The notion of 'instructional leadership', where the formal leader is believed to know the best form of instruction and closely supervises teachers' and pupils' work, has been researched for many years in North America. It has sometimes been referred to as 'pedagogical leadership' or 'educational leadership'. Its critical focus is on how teachers affect the progress of pupils and how the formal leader directly or indirectly influences teaching (Sergiovanni, 2001). This model of leadership clearly supports the centrality of leadership to a school's success but is rather narrow and does not integrate easily with other factors which might influence a school's success. Blase and Blase (1998), in their research however, develop the notion of instructional leadership further and recognise the importance of providing staff development, encouraging teacher reflection and building a collaborative learning community.

'Transformational leadership' assumes that the critical focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of the members of the organisation (Leithwood et al, 1999). Authority and influence are not exclusively allocated to formal leaders, but rather power is distributed to other members in the organisation who have the ability to inspire colleagues to accomplish the school's goals. Transformational leadership in schools emphasises building vision, establishing goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individual support, modelling good practice, demonstrating high expectations, creating a learning culture and developing management structures to encourage participation in decision-making (Leithwood et al, 1999). All these actions can have a contributory impact on the school's success.

In attempting to redefine the concept of leadership, Lambert (2003) views 'constructivist leadership' as transcending individuals, roles and behaviour and suggests that anyone in the

educational community – teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and pupils – can be involved in leadership actions. Indeed they have both the right and responsibility to fulfil their potential as a leader. Underlying this view are the assumptions that leadership is a reciprocal learning process and that it is a shared endeavour that requires the redistribution of power and authority. What is significant in this conception is that leadership is culturally embedded in the school's community and is directly related to student learning and high leadership capacity. Staff are committed, rather than compliant, and are engaged in learning relationships in a climate of trust. One further important point is about the values that drive leadership: in her analysis of leadership Lambert (2003) suggests that leadership is spiritually purposeful, allows for courage and risk and demonstrates low ego needs or selflessness. In a primary school, these values driving leadership might be crystallized in the reflective question "What is in the best interests of the children?"

Leadership

(both that of the headteacher and leadership at all levels)

↓

Teaching

↓

Learning

↓

Standards

↓

Success
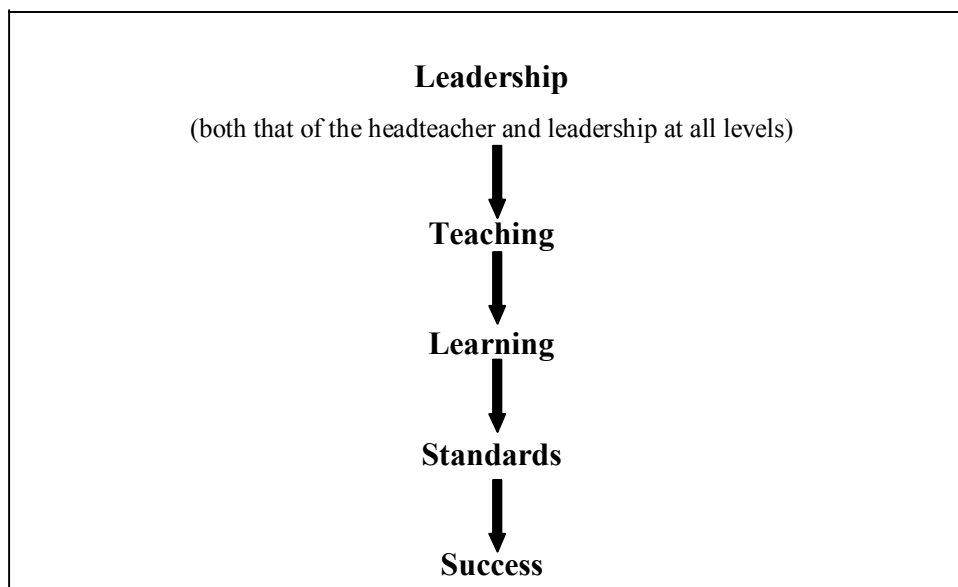
Figure 2.1   Impact of Leadership on Standards

So far it has been argued that total leadership – that is the leadership of the headteacher and leadership at all levels in the primary school – has an impact first of all on teaching, then learning and finally standards. (See Figure 2.1). Simultaneously leadership has an impact on relationships, ethos and community which also have an effect on standards. (See Figure 2.2). However this model is not straightforward; the reality is far more complex in practice. Tracing effective leadership to making a difference to what happens in classrooms is fraught with difficulty as often it is unclear who is influencing who.
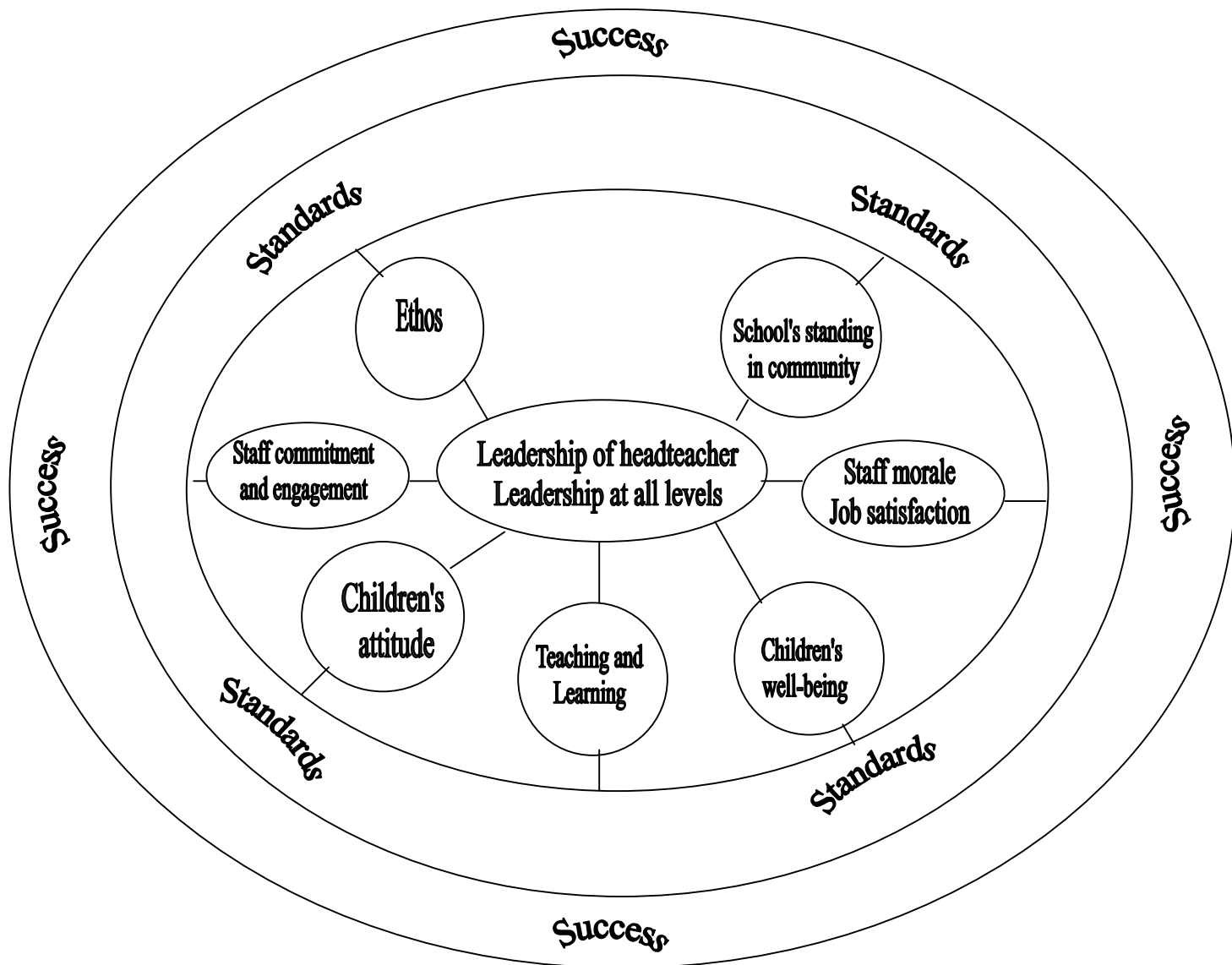
Figure 2.2 Centrality of leadership to a school's sustainable success

Hallinger and Heck (1999, pp4-5) note that a leader's influence takes three forms:

- direct effects – where a leader's actions directly influence school outcomes;
- indirect effects – where a leader affects outcomes indirectly through other variables;
- reciprocal effects – when a leader or leaders affect teachers and teachers affect the leaders and through these processes outcomes are affected.

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Although all three effects can be seen in the work of headteachers and other school leaders, Southworth (2005) identifies the indirect effects as being the largest, most common and most influential as leaders work with and through others. Ideas are mediated by staff and fed back through professional dialogue which leads to reciprocal learning. Knowledge is created in the interactions between people in working practices (Desforges 2002).

Southworth (2005) further argues that effective school leaders exert indirect influence through a range of strategies and processes including the careful deployment of school structures and systems. He identifies three key interrelated and overlapping strategies which when combined have a powerful influence. Modelling emphasises the power of example, high visibility and teacher expectation that the headteacher can 'walk the talk'. Monitoring emphasises a wide range of data analyses and assessment for learning as well as assessment of learning. Professional dialogue includes formal opportunities but also informal talk about teaching and learning where participants are led into analytic descriptions and articulation of self-knowledge. This would suggest that the role of the leader then is to facilitate learning and co-ordinate staff as leaders (Glickman, 1991).

West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998) suggest that leadership and learning are linked in a 'symbiotic relationship, mutually supportive and reinforcing'. Leadership that is centred on learning seems to operate at two levels; it applies to pupils (pedagogical instruction) and it applies to adults (andragogy). This model of leadership is about leading learning and learning about leadership (Fink, Stoll and Earl 2003). Southworth (2005) claims that leadership which makes a difference to a school's growth and development is learning-centred and that it works at two levels simultaneously, focusing on pupils' learning and orchestrating teachers' professional learning.

Successful leadership seems to depend in part on aspects of "distributed leadership". Distributed leadership is a complex term with little agreement as to meaning and a number of different interpretations (Bennett et al 2003). As a way of thinking about leadership, distributed leadership extends the boundaries of leadership, recognising expertise for leadership rather than formal position and sees leadership as 'fluid' (Bennett et al 2003). As such it is a powerful aid to developing and sharing effective leadership, although Fullan (2005) warns that giving autonomy to act is not the same as having the capacity to act. Successful school leadership needs to be complemented and balanced by consistent school structures and systems.

"Good management matters as much as good leadership. Distinctions between leadership and management are problematic. However a simple difference is that management is essentially about ensuring the school runs smoothly, while leadership is about ensuring the school runs somewhere. Too much management and a school may only run smoothly on the spot. Too much leadership and it may be running all over the place and never smoothly!"

(Southworth 2005, pp 13-14)

Good leadership is about doing things well (management) and doing the right thing (leadership) and glueing them together for the good of the school (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, Leithwood 2006).

In addition, other key areas of current school activity – planning processes, target setting, communication systems, monitoring systems, clear roles and responsibilities of leaders and policies for learning, teaching and assessment and marking – appear to be critical in supporting leadership focused on learning (Southworth, 2005). Sergiovanni (2001) recognises the potential of leadership which is centred on learning to make a difference to pupil achievement.

"Learning earns the centre-stage position because it is a powerful way for schools to adapt, to stay ahead, and to invent new solutions. ……………it seems clear that we can be much more deliberate in organizing schools in ways that enhance teacher learning and the learning of other adults. Further, as teachers learn more and as schools get smarter, students learn more too".

(p 119)

Whereas the school effectiveness movement concentrated on curriculum, teaching and teacher knowledge for decades, school improvement shifted the focus on to how and what the children actually learn.

The thesis now focuses on two "official", judgemental models of leadership which are clearly linked to learning but are also results driven. The first applies to all schools in England and comes from the Office for Standards in Education where learning has been at the centre of their agenda for some time (OFSTED, 2003). It is possible for a lesson to have clear, detailed planning, appropriate resources and good teacher knowledge, but if the children are not engaged and do not make progress in their learning from the beginning of the lesson to the end, then it will be judged 'inadequate'. Section 5 OFSTED inspections (2005) retain the centrality of learning and make a direct, unequivocal link to leadership. Judgements under the new framework fall into 4 categories;

1) outstanding   2) good   3) satisfactory and   4) inadequate. OFSTED (2005) openly acknowledges that "the bar has been raised" from Section 10 inspections to Section 5 inspections but will not make any direct comparison of judgement grades. Heads on the ground feel that the new "satisfactory" is at least equivalent to the old 'good', if not the old 'very good'. The judgement on standards is of paramount importance. If standards are judged to be 'good', then following the criteria of the framework, all other judgements, with the exception of pupil's personal development, are likely to be good or below. They cannot be better than good. So for example if standards are judged to be 'satisfactory' then the judgement for leadership and management can be no better than satisfactory as one of the criteria for good leadership and management is that standards are good. Consequently in domino fashion if standards are judged to be 'inadequate', then it is highly likely that leadership and management is also judged "inadequate".

In primary schools OFSTED's judgements about quality of learning and standards are based almost exclusively on Key Stage 2 results and to a much lesser extent on Key Stage 1 results. Inspectors place huge emphasis on the school's latest Performance and Assessment Report, known as the PANDA report (OFSTED, 2005), now on-line (RAISEonline, 2007), which provides statistics on a range of measurements of standards: percentages of Level 4 and over in Maths, English and Science at the end of Key Stage 2; percentages of Level 2 and over in Maths, Reading and Writing at the end of Key Stage 1; a 4 year summary of the average points score at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 1; attainment by a range of pupil characteristics (eg. special educational needs, free school meals) for tracking and targeted improvement; and Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 conversions. Greater emphasis is placed on new Contextual Value Added (CVA) models "devised to provide a better indication of the progress made by pupils" (DfES, 2006b). Figures are highlighted where they are significantly higher or lower than average. This reliance on the RAISEonline statistics represents a shift away from judging progress through lesson observations of learning as in previous inspection frameworks. Hill (2006, p92) is particularly critical of OFSTED's reliance on CVA, viewing it as "unintelligent accountability that erodes sustainable leadership."

It would seem that OFSTED judgements on standards are fatalistic and already predetermined by the RAISEonline report before the inspection starts. In addition schools have to grade themselves in the Self Evaluation Form (SEF), the other key document in a Section 5 inspection, with the added pressure that if your judgement is higher or lower than OFSTED inspectors, the monitoring and evaluation aspect of the school's leadership will be criticised. There is no 'wriggle room' in the RAISEonline report and the brevity of the inspection (1.5 days) affords little opportunity to

demonstrate the quality of teaching and learning and the progress children make as a counter balance to judgements made from the RAISEonline report. Explanations about standards being affected by cohort variability are often dismissed as excuses. The idolatry of measurement (Fielding, 1999) by key stage results amounts to putting schools into boxes by remote control and data tagging from the centre. High stakes indeed are placed on results in an ever increasing short term accountability climate. The 'raising the bar' analogy may be too competitive and result in demoralisation or demotivation. In track and field athletics, the high jump is one event where the bar is continuously raised to eliminate competitors in order to reach an outright winner. No matter how successful the competition and competitors have been, including even a world record, it always ends in failure with the last competitor/s unable to jump the new height. 'Raising the bar' for schools and comparing them against each other ends in OFSTED continually failing some schools, with staff and pupils becoming 'losers' and potential casualties. A further note of caution about this direction needs to be expressed. Ironically and in contrast to the high status placed on results there is evidence that parents are highly satisfied with their child's primary school, and will actually remain loyal to it, even though OFSTED has judged it weak or inadequate. This suggests that parents are more focused on broader aspects of education at the primary stage than educational outputs (OFSTED, 2006).

Arguably OFSTED accountability then poses a dilemma for primary schools. In the short term they have to survive; they have to successfully pass a Section 5 OFSTED inspection. Yet the framework of a Section 5 inspection does not support, or may even pose a threat to, deeper learning which promotes understanding, interpretation, application, evidence, argument and intrinsic motivation (Ramsden, 1988). The pressure to produce short term results may blind schools and hinder them from having a long term vision. It is also demotivating; there is much bewilderment amongst experienced heads who in their last Section 10 inspection were judged to be a 'good school', have made considerable progress since then and now find under the Section 5 framework they are judged 'satisfactory'. Indeed there is much dissatisfaction with the term 'satisfactory'. There appears to be confusion as to how the new judgement relates to effectiveness and success. Is a 'satisfactory' school still effective and successful but not as much as a 'good' or 'outstanding' school? In the long term, some school leaders want to focus on deeper learning, rather than teaching to the tests and see the OFSTED framework as naïve, linear and counter productive to sustainability, as it judges their schools and their leadership and management less favourably. Without doubt, from the viewpoint of an experienced primary headteacher, a better model of successful leadership than OFSTED's technicist approach is needed.

The second, alternative 'official' model of successful leadership which has been selected for this thesis comes from the National College for School Leadership. In identifying the first tranche of 50 National Leaders of Education (NLE), who would be able to support schools in challenging circumstances, particularly those in special measures, the National College for School Leadership has published criteria on how to be successful (NCSL, 2006b) (See Figure 2.3).

NLE's school performance	Expectations of NLE
▪ very good or outstanding leadership and management (as judged by the most recent OFSTED inspection) ▪ sustained high standards ▪ improved value added pupil performance ▪ very good or outstanding senior and middle level leadership within the current school	▪ have a deep understanding of the teaching and learning process ▪ to be articulate and reflective ▪ committed to taking responsibility for other schools ▪ determined to improve outcomes for children ▪ able to inspire and energize ▪ expert in managing and sustaining change ▪ strategic in approach ▪ creative, flexible and solution focused

Figure 2.3 Adapted from Essential Criteria for a National Leader of Education (NCSL, 2006b).

The success of a NLE is likely to be measured by positive feedback from the school or LA, improved CVA scores and early emergence from special measures. Other expectations would be a reduction in exclusions, complaints and pupil absence and improved school leadership and management, popularity of school for places and staff morale. It is refreshing that the criteria for successful leadership in this model are a combination of such broader based factors, for example a deep understanding of the teaching and learning process and a strategic approach. Nevertheless it is still driven by the standards agenda and short term in outlook. A NLE is expected to work with a primary school in special measures for less than 2 years so it is surprising that improved CVA scores, more of a long term goal, is one of the success criteria.

A further question has to be raised about transferability of successful leadership from the context of one school to the context of another school, particularly in challenging circumstances. Context such as the quality of staff, the socio-economic status of the pupils or the community in which the school is set can be a huge variable and a significant influence on a school's overall effectiveness (Teddie,

Stringfield and Reynolds, 2000). Leithwood (2003) concludes from the research literature that leadership can not be separated from the context in which it is exerted.

> "Leadership is contingent on the setting, the nature of the social organisation, the goals being pursued, the individuals involved, resources and timeframes and many other factors."

<div align="center">(Leithwood 2003, p9)</div>

Schools with a greater proportion of pupils with high socio-economic status tend to have an advantage because they receive greater support from parents, experience fewer discipline problems, tend to have atmospheres that are conducive to learning and are more likely to attract and retain excellent teachers (Willms, 1992). This highlights a further weakness in the reliability of CVA scores as a fair measure of success. While CVA attempts to take into consideration the socio-economic status of pupils, it fails to factor in the level of support from parents, the cultural context of the community and the school's ability to attract and retain the best teachers.

From a study of the literature on success, strategy and sustainability, the thesis considers the quality of the contribution of the headteacher to be crucial. Apart from obvious organisational abilities and both leadership and management skills (Davies B., 2004, Southworth, 2005, OFSTED, 2005), the headteacher needs to identify leadership potential and develop leadership capacity. In terms of Fullan's vision of sustainability and system thinkers in action, the headteacher has to be a 'new theoritician' and leave behind a legacy of other 'new theoriticians to achieve large-scale, sustainable reform' (Fullan 2005). In light of headteacher resignation and an ageing workforce, this is a very challenging vision to realise.

> "These are leaders at all levels of the system who proactively and naturally take into account and interact with larger parts of the system as they bring about deeper reform and help produce other leaders working on the same issues. They are theoreticians, but they are practitioners whose theories are lived in action every day. In fact, that is what makes their impact so powerful. Their ideas are woven into daily actions that make a difference."
> (Fullan, 2005, px)

Of particular significance are the strategic capacities the headteacher models and how they are developed in leaders throughout the school. The reality is that the job of formal leaders is complex and challenging (Caldwell, 2007), high on responsibility and high on stress. Heads and senior

leaders are working longer hours, stay in post less time and are retiring earlier (Hill, 2006). They have to provide the strategic thrust, articulate the strategy and enact the vision by 'walking the talk', make sense of internal and external environments, sustain the commitments and motivation for the vision to be realised and operate strategic timing (Davies B., 2004, Kakabadse, Nortier and Abramovici, 1998, Jeans, 1998). Despite these pressures and demands, some leaders, who have led significant and sustained change, often in challenging circumstances, have managed to steer a preferred future, rather than simply cope with external demands (Leithwood, 2006), have discovered that 'success breeds success' (West, Ainscow and Stanford, 2005) and claim the job is exhilarating (Caldwell, 2007).

> "In the midst of evidence that fewer people are seeking to be principals, that an increasing number of those who are appointed are falling by the wayside and that stress, work intensification and complexity are at an all-time high, there are many for whom these trends do not apply: they find the work to be exhilarating."
> (Caldwell, 2007, p1)

In research-orientated workshops in four countries, school leaders were asked to report exhilarating aspects of their work. The highest ranked themes were success (e.g. with a particular project, solving a problem, meeting a challenge, realising a vision), staff (e.g. working with, observing, mentoring staff) and students (experiencing and celebrating the accomplishments of students) (Caldwell, 2007). The major implications of the work is the importance of building the capacities of leaders first of all, to maximise the probability of success and secondly, to distribute leadership in the school.

This picture of exhilarating leadership contrasts sharply with schools lacking investment in capacity building and "placing people in high alert dependency mode, jumping from one solution to another in a desperate attempt to comply" with external demands (Fullan, 2005, p11). Individuals exposed to rapid and often unpredictable change can develop a sense of helplessness and confusion. This is where the high quality personal and interpersonal skills possessed by strategic leaders are so important (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005). Headteachers need empathy, motivation and communication, as well as a clear understanding of the direction in which the school is going, in order to influence and take colleagues on the strategic journey to sustainable success.

Strategic leadership, a dimension of leadership, not a model of leadership, is seen as a critical component of successful, sustainable schools. Davies, Davies and Ellison (2005) divide their research findings into what strategic leaders do and what characteristics they possess. (Figure 2.4)

What strategic leaders do	The characteristics strategic leaders possess
They set the direction of the school.	They challenge and question – they have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present.
They translate strategy into action.	They prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning and build new mental models to frame their own and others' understanding.
They align the people, the organisation and the strategy.	They display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system.
They determine effective strategic intervention points.	They have powerful personal and professional networks.
They develop strategic capabilities within the school.	They have high quality personal and interpersonal skills.

Figure 2.4 - Strategic leadership: actions and characteristics

(from Davies, 2006, p106)

Effective headteachers have a strategic view outside their operational thinking to develop medium and long term perspectives which involve a number of planning approaches, building capacity to weigh up the benefits of different future possibilities. They are good 'complete finishers' (Belbin, 1996) able to deliver the strategy, and 'see it through' (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1998) as well as design it. Through a series of 'strategic conversations' they skilfully align the people, the organisation and the strategy together to be sustainable. They are able to 'seize the opportunity' to maximise learning and change, demonstrating the discernment to notice and the wisdom to act at the right time (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001). At the same time, they develop the strategic capabilities of other leaders in the school so that they can draw on a reservoir of abilities when the school faces new challenges in the future.

Strategic headteachers are restless and not complacent (Davies B., 2004) and while invitational and collaborative, will still tackle directly 'within school variation' (NCSL, 2004). They challenge and question average performance showing a determination to do whatever must be done to produce the best long term result, no matter how difficult (Collins, 2001).

> "One of the driving forces behind strategic leaders is that they see that the organisation can perform in different ways in the future. They want to challenge the current situation and improve things in the future. This means they have to deal with the ambiguity of not being satisfied with present arrangements and at the same time not being able to change things as quickly as they might want."
> (Davies, 2006, p112)

Sustaining leaders demonstrate deep personal humility and intense professional will (Fullan, 2004). Collins (2001) calls those leaders Level 5 executives who build enduring greatness and whose "ambition is first and foremost for the institution" (p21).

Developmental leaders exhibit "a receptive alertness" (Perkins, 2003) in weighing up situations quickly and intuitively. They prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning, and create new mental models to develop staff understanding. They view CPD as an important vehicle for themselves and staff in becoming 'perpetual learners' (Coble, 2005). Strategic leaders invest much time and effort into maintaining and extending their networks to share knowledge and gain understanding of rapid and multiple change (Davies, 2006). The spiritual and moral leadership of headteachers and their 'reservoir of hope' are considered important to sustainability.

> "An internal reservoir of hope is the calm centre at the heart of the individual
> leader from which their values and vision flow and which makes effective
> interpersonal engagement possible no matter what the external pressures.
> The external reservoir of hope is where the head acts as the wellspring of
> self-belief and directional focus for the school."
> (Flintham, 2003, pp2-3)

The headteacher also has to operate a balancing act, dealing with competing demands of staff and facing often paradoxical requirements of parents and government (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001). In dealing with such difficult and complex situations, leaders who promote a feedback culture run the risk of critical comments which may be personally hurtful but in the long term increase team effectiveness (Kakabadse, Nortier and Abramovic, 1998). Leithwood (2006) acknowledges the danger of destructive tension and unhealthy divisions but finds nothing wrong with degrees of creative tension which might bond people and glue the school together.

Davies B.J. (2004) refers to 'the strategic intelligence' of the head to understand the school in the context of the wider community and the uniqueness of that particular environment. To give an example to illustrate this, the researcher's school is popular and oversubscribed in several year groups and is the subject of many appeals from parents to the LA. When selecting the school, parents do not cite national test results and league table position but 'word of mouth' reputation and activities in, out of and after school. Using the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (2005), one of the star products of the school is the school band, unique in the area and well known in the region. The headteacher also has to use strategic wisdom to get the best out of resources – finance, people including their goodwill, time, energy, the physical learning environment and equipment. As a

consequence of technological advancement, schools are inundated with data (Leithwood, 2006) so strategic wisdom again is needed to know when and how to be selective and creative with information to avoid drowning.

The ultimate contribution of the headteacher to a school's sustainable success is planning his/her leadership succession (Hargreaves, 2005, Lovely, 2006). The challenge to headteachers is to consider how improvements they have implemented or have yet to initiate will live on after their promotion or retirement. Rejecting secret hopes that the successor will not be as successful, the selfless leader does not suffer from delusions of indispensability and draws on moral leadership to rise above what Hargreaves (2006) calls "darkest desires" to prepare all stakeholders, particularly existing staff and the incoming headteacher, for the impact of leadership succession. In managing this 'ending' well and ethically, Hargreaves (2006) suggests it is important to understand if the succession is planned or unplanned and if it promotes continuity or discontinuity as in Figure 2.5.

	Continuity	*Discontinuity*
Planned (purposeful)	*Planned continuity*	*Planned discontinuity*
Unplanned (accidental/unintentional)	*Unplanned continuity*	*Unplanned discontinuity*

Figure 2.5 - Planning and continuity from Hargreaves (2006, p179)

It may be that succession planning should be a required part of a school's improvement plan and strategic plan. Courting successors (Lovely, 2006) and building leadership capacity at all levels also soften any negative impact of succession (Spillane and Halverson, 2001).

There are two further points which are pertinent, if the contribution of the headteacher to sustainability is accepted as significant. First, given the high level of headteacher resignation (Howson, 2002) and the reasons for leaving headship before normal retirement age (Flintham, 2003, Hargreaves, 2005), headteachers need help with sustainable strategies through networked support, career-long continuous professional development and planned exit strategies. Secondly, it highlights that the key appointment of the headteacher remains the major strategic decision made by governors. In planning a successor, they have the opportunity to continue the present course or change direction.

Leadership then is central to a school's sustainable success. This is the total leadership in the school which is the crucial contribution of the headteacher, supported by leadership at all levels. It needs to influence directly and indirectly and make a difference to the educational outcomes for pupils and to the leadership capacity of all other adults in the organisation. It needs to provide direction to achieve the goal of deep learning and balance the short term goal of survival accountability with the long term goal of sustainable success. The concepts of 'sustainability' and 'strategy', and how they relate to leadership and a school's success, have already been mentioned on several occasions. They will now be explored in greater depth.

2.3   <u>Sustainability and its constituents</u>

Sustainability is usually associated with ecology and conserving natural resources. Drawing on the concise Oxford dictionary definition and applying it to an education context, sustainability is the ability to support for a long period, to endure and to keep going continuously. Fullan (2005) suggests that sustainability is not about how to maintain good programs beyond implementation and not how to keep up relentless energy. He maintains that sustainability is not linear and is not straightforward to define.

> "Sustainability is the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose."

> (Fullan, 2005, pix)

Sustainability is concerned with human resources and treating staff as professionals. Continuous improvement should provide challenge without causing exhaustion or demoralisation: there should be a moral obligation to consider improvement effects on staff and pupils. Hargreaves (2005) accepts that schools need to act urgently to improve but may have to wait patiently for results: both learning and improvement are slow.

> "Sustainable improvement is not a grindingly monotonous gradient of annual increments. Real learners have curves. Learning is not instant or steady and does not immediately show."

> (Hargreaves, 2005, p177)

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) emphasise the importance of protecting and sustaining deep learning and the need for resources and support, and argue that sustainable improvement has to be enduring (not evanescent), demands committed relationships, requires investment in building long term capacity and contributes to "the growth and the good of everyone". It seems to be about sustenance as well as sustainability. It is also about quality, as the principle of sustainability is an antidote to superficial, simplistic change, not a way of perpetuating it.

> "Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last; it addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future."

> (Hargreaves and Fink, 2000, p32)

On economic grounds, sustainability is about retaining and nourishing the valuable asset of leadership and not sacrificing present and future leaders for short term gains.

Davies, B. (2006) argues for a balanced approach which seeks success both in the short term and long term and usefully defines sustainability as

> "the ability of individuals and schools to continue to improve to meet new challenges
> and complexity in a way that does not damage individuals or the wider community
> but builds capacity and capability to be successful in new and demanding contexts."

(p14)

Sustainability of success as a goal for schools is clearly desirable but what does sustainability consist of and how can it be achieved? The first point to make is that the concept of sustainability in educational leadership is in its infancy. Therefore in Figure 2.6 some recent explorations of the nature of sustainability have been tentatively brought together in order to examine how it relates to educational leadership and a school's success.

The second point is that in each analysis of sustainability there is both common ground and also unique features. For example there is agreement that sustainability has a strong moral basis, places considerable importance on deeper learning and invests in people as leaders. The third point is that the unit of analysis and focus varies among the four emergent models. Fullan (2005) takes the education system as a whole as his unit of analysis and claims his eight strategies can be applied to any public service or corporate institution, while Davies, B. (2006) demonstrates how sustainability is an important component in the nine factors needed to develop a strategically focused school. Both Hargreaves (2005) and Hill (2006) isolate principles to guide sustainable leadership itself and so their unit of analysis is the individual leader. The fourth point is that, in every model, collaboration between schools is promoted as a worthwhile and essential concept and this may be in tension with the competitive element inherent in an accountability climate of test results and OFSTED inspections. The fifth point, although obvious, still needs to be stated; these elements, factors or principles of sustainability are not exhaustive nor exclusive; it is very likely that others exist.

Fullan (2005) "Leadership and Sustainability"	Hargreaves (2005) "Sustainable Leadership"
8 elements of sustainability	**10 principles of sustainable leadership**
1. Public service with a moral purpose 2. Commitment to changing context at all levels 3. Lateral capacity building through networks 4. Intelligent accountability and vertical relationships (encompassing both capacity building and accountability) 5. Deep learning 6. Dual commitment to short term and long term results 7. Cyclical energizing 8. The long lever of leadership	1. It matters: it creates and preserves sustaining learning 2. It lasts: it secures enduring success over time 3. It spreads: it sustains the leadership of others 4. It is socially just 5. It is resourceful: it develops rather than depletes human and material resources 6. It develops environmental diversity and capacity 7. It is activist: it engages assertivity with its environment 8. It is vigilant: it monitors the environment to check it is staying healthy and not beginning to decline 9. It respects and builds on the past in its quest to create a better future 10. It is patient: it defers gratification instead of seeking instant results
Davies B. (2006) **"Leading the Strategically Focused School"**	**Hill (2006)** **"Leadership that lasts"**
9 factors of strategically focused schools	**10 principles for sustainable leadership**
1. develop a culture of sustainability 2. balance the short term and the long term 3. develop strategic measures of success 4. be morally driven 5. focus on learning 6. pay attention to strategic processes 7. pay attention to strategic approaches 8. be part of networked systems 9. develop sustainable strategic leadership across the school	1. believe in the power and purpose of learning 2. want the best for all the young people in their area 3. command authority but use that authority wisely 4. share and foster leadership 5. build and sustain a learning community 6. practise intelligent accountability 7. balance short and long term goals 8. renew themselves 9. work closely with governors 10. communicate clearly and consistently

Figure 2.6 - Emerging concept of sustainability in educational leadership

Fullan's elements of sustainability serve as a useful foundation for discussing what sustainability consists of and how it can be achieved. The first is "public service with a moral purpose" in which he advocates strong public services, responsive to the needs and aspirations of citizens, and moral purpose which is supportive or demanding, depending on circumstance. Flintham (2003) found that headteachers had a variety of personal replenishment and sustainability strategies to fulfil their spiritual and moral leadership. Hargreaves (2005) emphasises that sustainability cares for the emotional health and well-being of teachers, developing rather than depleting 'a scarce environmental resource'. Fullan (2003) believes that moral purpose must transcend the individual to become an organisational and system quest to raise achievement and close the gap between best and worst, to treat people with respect without accepting low expectations and to improve all schools and districts. All levels – school/community, district and system – are compelled to take moral purpose seriously. Therefore decisions about the purpose of education should be morally driven. In driving standards up, it is important to get the right balance between attainment and achievement, between attainment and fulfilment and between future employability and personal development.

The second element is "commitment to changing context at all levels", developing schools, LAs and central government bodies as 'learning systems' capable of bringing about their own continuous transformation. Although this sustainability element is unquestionably worthwhile and socially just (Hargreaves, 2005), in practice it will be tough to achieve, requiring time and cumulative effort. Fullan (2005) advocates increasing "the amount of purposeful interaction between and among individuals within and across the tri-levels, and indeed between and across systems" (p17). Commitment to changing systems and helping stakeholders understand the bigger picture will be enhanced by the effective use of "strategic conversations" (Davies, B., 2003).

The third element is "lateral capacity building through networks" which develops people, promotes collaboration rather than competition and deepens motivation and ownership, key ingredients for sustainability of effort and engagement. This element recognises that setting targets is not powerful enough and that 'informed prescription' (Barber, 2002) is unable to solve the plateau problem where the same great effort is now needed to stand still. Instead, the 2000s is regarded strategically as an opportune time for 'informed professional judgement' (Barber, 2002) with people learning best from each other through networks such as network learning communities and the Primary Leadership Programme (NCSL 2003). However, although these lateral strategies are potentially

powerful, it is difficult to assess how deep the learning is and how they have impacted on school cultures. In fact, OFSTED criticised the first year of the Primary Leadership Programme for short-termism and a hasty introduction and called for better selection and training of primary consultants (OFSTED, 2004). However from strategically focused schools, it is clear that being part of a networked system, which might be local, national and international, provides the peer support for school leaders to meet the challenges of complex leadership (Davies, B. 2006).

The fourth element is "intelligent accountability and vertical relationships" which tries to create a balance between central government, regional directors, local authorities and schools, conscious that too much direction demotivates people and too little permits drift. The new OFSTED framework (2005) which started in September 2005 makes an external judgement of the school's own self-evaluation systems and is perceived by government as intelligent accountability.

> "An accountability framework, which puts a premium on ensuring effective and ongoing self-evaluation in every school combined with more focused external inspection, linked closely to the improvement cycle of the school."

> (Miliband, 2004, p6)

This co-dependent relationship is thought to hold the system in dynamic tension, allowing enough ownership and capacity at local level to prioritise and give coherence to the plethora of initiatives and deal with problems of overload. As identified earlier, the problem with the OFSTED accountability framework is that it is linear and results driven.

The fifth element is "deep learning", which Fullan (2005) advocates is for pupils, teachers, schools, districts and government if sustainability is to be achieved. It is an emergent strategy (Boisot, 1995), demanding learning, experimentation and adaptations (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001). It is this overriding focus on learning that Davies (2006) sees as the central cultural and organisational ethos of the school.

> "How adults in the school learn, and how they develop a reflective learning culture, and how the school becomes a 'learning organisation' are essential if the totality of learning is to be the central feature of the school."
>
> (Davies, 2006, p155)

Crucial to deep learning is reducing the fear factor and seeing mistakes as an opportunity to improve. Fullan (2005) makes a helpful distinction between failing stupidly (you are not allowed to keep making the same mistake) and failing intelligently (forgive and remember), the latter clearly linked to sustainability. Fear can also focus on 'the short run' and blaming individuals (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2002) and prevent sustainability. This may be the very effect of a Section 5 OFSTED, as already discussed.

While the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies are arguably the most ambitious large scale reform effort in the world (Leithwood et al, 2004) and results are impressive and remarkable with some closing of the gap (Fullan, 2005), improvement is incremental and fragile with little evidence of deep learning and pupils being absorbed (Fullan, 2005). Real learning is slow and takes time (Hargreaves, 2005). In "Building Learning Power", Claxton (2002) examines four aspects of deep learning for pupils; resilient - helping them focus on learning and resist distraction; resourceful – drawing on a wide range of appropriate learning methods and strategies; reflective – thinking profitably about learning and themselves as learners; and reciprocal – making use of peers productively, enjoyably and responsibly. It is refreshing that government is moving away from assessment of learning and a target setting culture which is the master, rather than the servant, to making increasing use of assessment for learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998), personalisation and personalised learning. Mumby's "Priorities for Sustainability" (2003) focus on learning and are collaborative.

The sixth element is "dual commitment to short term and long term results". It is strategically important to have a vision of the long term and invest in it to make the system stronger and proactive, but at the same time short term results are essential for political expediency and winning public confidence for longer term investment (Barber, 2004). Sustainability requires financial investment over time but, by developing capacity and people, yields good value for money. Hargreaves and Fink (2005) believe that short term attainment targets are incompatible with long-term sustainability but Davies (2006) sees this as a false dichotomy. Strategically focused schools establish a culture that supports long term development and the short term agenda is set against this long term template of sustainability. The risk is that a primary school committed exclusively to the long term could be closed down by the OFSTED accountability framework long before it realised its long term results. In addition the school is morally committed to help cohorts of current pupils achieve their full potential.

> "A strategically focused school is one that is educationally effective in the short term but has a clear framework and processes to translate core moral purpose and vision into excellent educational provision which is challenging and sustainable in the medium to long term. It has the leadership that enables short term objectives to be met while concurrently building capability and capacity for the long term."
> (Davies, 2006, p104)

The seventh element is "cyclical energizing" which Fullan (2005) suggests is a powerful new idea for sustainability. Energy, rather than time, is seen as the fundamental currency of high performance and strategies that bring initial success will then be abandoned for emergent strategies that lead to higher levels of performance. Strategic timing (Davies, B., 2004) may be crucial.

The eighth element is "the long lever of leadership" which Fullan (2005) sees as the key to sustainability in the present decade. Hargreaves (2005) argues that "sustainable leadership captures, develops and retains deep pools of leaders of learning in all systems and our schools" (p177). Leadership is needed to put in place the other seven elements: this is a high risk strategy, as without it, the other elements presumably fall. It is also a different, sophisticated leadership at all levels, continuously producing similar leaders to succeed. Charismatic leadership is not appropriate as it is negatively associated with sustainability (Fullan, 2004). It is also difficult to envisage Wood's 'enchanted headteachers' (2001), judged successful and effective by OFSTED and sustained by enthusiasm, passion, a closeness to the children and an emotional involvement in their work, having the capacity to meet Fullan's demanding expectations.

> "………we need a system laced with leaders who are trained to think in bigger terms and to act in ways that affect larger parts of the system as a whole: the new theoreticians."
>
> (Fullan, 2005, p27)

This new kind of leadership – "system thinkers in action" or "the new theoreticians: doers with big minds" (Fullan 2005) – seems far removed from descriptions of headteachers leaving the profession because 'reservoirs of hope' have run dry (Flintham, 2003).

Of fundamental importance in creating a strategic and sustainable primary school is developing people. A school's most valuable resource for ensuring pupils fulfil their potential is the quality of its teaching and learning support staff (Davies, B. 2006). Investment in strategies to enhance their pedagogic skills and their wider contribution to the development of the school should yield good

dividends. In this way, accountability is shared, schools get the best out of staff long term and future leaders for the system are nurtured. In developing a culture of sustainability, schools can not depend on a single leader but have to make use of the expertise, talent and experience of wider groups of leaders. Many researchers and writers cite the involvement, participation and motivation of people as the key to strategic processes and sustainability (Davies B., 2004, Davies and Davies, 2004, Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1998, Peters, 1987, Leithwood et al, 2004, Flintham, 2003). Empowering people is organisationally effective in building understanding, consensus and transparency, providing challenge and inviting alternative solutions.

All too often in recent years, staff have become casualties in an accountability climate of OFSTED inspections, workload issues and pressure for short term results. For sustainability, Hill (2006) suggests we need to focus on "leadership that lasts – not leadership that burns brightly and then burns out" (p12). In a similar vein, Lovely (2006) uses the metaphor of "disposable lighters" and worries about the leaders discarded and lost when the flames run out. One of ten principles of sustainable leadership advocated by Hargreaves (2005) is being resourceful, developing human resources without depreciating them.

> "Leadership that drains its leaders dry through multiple demands, overwork or excessive expectations is not leadership that will last. The emotional health of leaders is a scarce environmental resource. Sustainable leadership therefore thinks not only of the short term needs of the system but also cares for leaders' personal and professional selves. Otherwise it brings about short term gains by mortgaging the entire future of leadership."

> (Hargreaves, 2005, p183)

This is closely aligned to two of Hill's (2006) ten principles of school leadership that lasts: sharing and fostering leadership both within and across schools (Principle 4) and building and sustaining a learning community, investing in all staff and continually evaluating a school's work and effectiveness (Principle 5). In discussing successful school leadership through practitioner perspectives and academic analysis (Leithwood, 2006), a banking analogy is attributed to building leadership capacity where people are 'the capital' and schools 'make deposits' as an investment. Building leadership capacity or capability at all levels (Stoll and Earl, 2003) and producing the school leaders of the future (Fullan, 2005) are key priorities of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL, 2002, NCSL, 2004, West-Burnham, 2004, NCSL, 2006a).

> "Sustainability is the goal; capacity is the engine that will ultimately power the sustainability journey."

(Stoll and Earl, 2003, p502)

Davies, B. (2004) differentiates between capability, which is the mix of skills and competencies possessed by the people in the organisation to achieve a task, and capacity, which is the resource level available at any given time to achieve a task. Business literature uses the term "capability", whereas in much of the educational literature "capacity" is used as an overall term to mean capability and capacity. In schools, capability is a negative concept as it is associated with procedures for dealing with poor performance.

> "Capacity building involves developing the collective ability – dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation and resources – to act together to bring about positive change."

(Fullan, 2005, p4)

Day (2001) views leadership development and capacity building as the same and points out that organisations orientate towards expanding capacity "in anticipation of unforeseen challenges." Davies and Davies (2004) argue that schools focusing on strategic capabilities position themselves to be sustainable and successful in the longer term.

Developing people to be leaders at all levels involves sharing or distributing leadership (Gronn, 2003). However Fullan (2005) notes that giving autonomy to act is not the same thing as capacity. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) identify 3 essential capacities to develop in leaders. 'Absorptive capacity' refers to the ability to absorb new knowledge and understanding to learn smartly and can occur at individual and organisation level, while 'adaptive capacity' refers to the ability to adapt to change. 'Managerial wisdom' combines the properties of discernment with understanding people and their relationships, demonstrating sensitivity to the concerns of individual groups. This resonates in practice with the experienced headteachers in Wood's research (2001).

> "Respect for and sensitivity to the needs of others, placing a high value upon quality of relationships throughout the school community. This respect and sensitivity is modelled strongly in all they say and do. They are builders of teams and developers of people."

(Wood, 2001, p1)

Managerial wisdom is also about having 'the finger on the pulse' (Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1986), the capacity to take the right action at the right critical moment and seize the opportunity when it arises. Caldwell (2004) uses the word 'sagacity' to describe the capacities demonstrated in successful self-managing schools. Davies, B.J. (2004) outlines 3 strategic wisdoms; 'people wisdom' which is the capacity to understand what motivates people and how to work co-operatively with them, 'contextual wisdom', the capacity to see the school in relationship to the wider community and the educational world in which it belongs and 'procedural wisdom', the capacity to make the right choice of strategic approach and strategic processes.

Sustaining people and building capacity is a huge task and takes time. It is important not to expect a 'strategic leap' (Davies, B., 2003) immediately and at the same time not to lose sight of short term results. Much depends on the quality of on-site learning, professional development and networks locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Fullan (2005) emphasises the on-site learning, "the daily habit of *working together*" and learning by doing, and succession planning to safeguard continuity of direction, caused by staff turnover. Primary schools with their intimate nature and size (Benson 2001) and 'informal, honeycomb structures' (du Quesnay, 2003) are well placed to further develop on-site training. Tailoring meaningful on-site learning is nevertheless a tall order for primary schools and they need support from local, regional and central agencies. Coaching is seen as a flexible tool for building organisational capacity (Suggett, 2006) but much depends on the skill and belief of the coach and careful matching of coach with coached. Literature on coaching appropriate to schools is limited and even where coaching is reported to be effective and highly valued, heads surprisingly had no formal training in it (Holmes, 2003).

Professional dialogue about learning and leadership, modelled in the simple slogan "It's good to talk" (Peters, 1987, Luck, 2003), is arguably a very important tool in building capacity. Paradoxically it is also the weakest link. To avoid the pooling of ignorance and to minimise social talk and grumbling, professional dialogue needs to be rigorous and focused. Formal meetings need to be led, with relationships comfortable but not cosy. It is also about confidence and trust to have open and honest conversations. Unfortunately some staff may lack the discipline, time management and interpersonal skills to ensure quality of professional learning. ICT, through e-mail and on-line communities such as Talk2Learn (NCSL), adds another dimension to professional dialogue. To enable people to develop a strategic perspective and to engage commitment and understanding, 'strategic conversations' (Davies B., 2003) – discussions about whole school issues and future trends facing the school – are vital. Day to day interactions need to be predominantly 'progressive',

not 'regressive', so that schools become 'process smart', (i.e. good exchange of ideas, quality decisions and solutions, farseeing plans), and 'people smart', (i.e. interactions that foster cohesion and energize people to work together) (Perkins, 2003). Professional dialogue is more complex than it seems, but unquestionably teachers learn best from each other (Fullan, 2004).

Continuous professional development (CPD), sustained throughout a career, is a significant contributor to building capacity (Davies and Coates, 2005). The General Teaching Council has worked with teachers and LAs to produce frameworks linked to the National Standards for Teachers Career Development, covering NQT, Years 2 and 3 right through to experienced headteacher and outlining opportunities at individual, school, network of schools, LA and national levels (Sunderland LEA, 2004). Off-site conferences and courses, including those leading to accreditation, are valuable, especially in avoiding isolation and gaining external views. However these need to be linked closely to on-site opportunities and to personalised performance management targets to support learning and career development (West, Ainscow and Stanford, 2005). CPD is not fixed (Leithwood, 2006) but should be structured, differentiated and updated regularly, and evaluated in terms of impact on standards (Stroud, 2005). Communication technologies (e.g. Teachers' TV, DVDs) may provide innovative and flexible solutions to CPD which give an external view but can be used conveniently at school or at home. Collaboration and networking with other schools provide valuable professional learning opportunities and can include visits and working groups, possibly lesson observations, mentoring and exchanges. There are of course huge logistical and accountability constraints to overcome and again it may be difficult to ensure deep and wise learning network communities (Fullan, 2004). Primary Strategy Learning Networks have gone some way towards dealing with the perennial factor of funding and providing the time and space for schools to meet, share and reflect together.

Investing in people is seen as an essential requirement in creating strategic and sustainable primary schools. By building staff capacity and treating them as professionals (IQEA, 2006), a vital and scarce resource is recognised. At the same time, the emphasis on the professional development of staff, encouraging them to think deeply and make decisions about teaching and learning, is a move away from the micro-management and short term actions of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy where some teachers may have become overly reliant on long, detailed unit plans as if they were scripts to enact. It is hoped that this research will throw further light on how successful schools are providing on-site learning opportunities, responding to the changing

face of CPD, operating systems and strategies for succession planning and adapting to an increase in support staff and flexible working arrangements.

2.4. <u>Strategy and strategic processes and approaches</u>

Strategy is a difficult concept to grasp and to define (Whittington, 2001). It is a widely used concept in politics, military action and the media. In education, strategy is a frequently used concept in national and local government policies. In the last decade, primary schools have implemented the National Literacy Strategy, the National Numeracy Strategy and the Primary Strategy. More recently national strategies in education have included a timeframe (DfES, 2004, DfES, 2006). This concept of 'strategy' refers to and aims to improve the education system as a whole. At classroom level, the term 'strategy' is also frequently used in teacher dialogue (e.g. developing strategies to deal with disruptive pupil behaviour) and in learning (e.g. strategies to help children understand the inverse operation). Of course these classroom strategies – smaller actions or tactics – may be part of a much larger strategy and could be examples of translating that strategy into action.

Davies B. (2003, 2004, 2006) takes a corporate view and usefully defines strategy as encompassing direction setting, taking a broader view of major dimensions of the organisation and dealing with the medium to long term as well as the short term. Strategy is both a perspective to view the future and a template against which to evaluate current actions. It is also about ensuring the sustainability and success of the school as in Figure 2.7.

Operational processes and planning (SDP and target setting)	Effective	Functionally successful in the short term but not sustainable long term	Successful and sustainable in both the short term and long term
	Ineffective	Failure inevitable both in the short and long term	Short term crises will prevent longer term sustainability
		Ineffective	Effective
		Strategic processes and approaches	

Figure 2.7- Short term viability and long term sustainability (from Davies, B., 2006, p18)

Without effective strategic processes and approaches, even the most successful schools in the short term will not be able to sustain that success long term. This is a crucial point and highlights the relevance and significance of strategy and strategic processes and approaches as a means of achieving sustainability.

> "…………strategy is about providing for the sustainability of the school. Strategy is not isolated from shorter term planning but integrated with it. It needs to be built on sound short term operational planning and vice versa. Obviously it is important that improving schools do not regress to previous underperformance and that successful schools can build on that success and move to significantly higher levels of performance. To achieve this, schools not only need short term improvement agendas but also a strategic approach to longer term sustainability".

(Davies, B., 2006, p17)

In supporting this definition Davies B.J. (2004) puts strategy in the specific context of a primary school and shows how it is a way of managing the impact of external trends and influences and making conscious decisions about those influences, setting priorities based on available resources and making informed choices. Strategy is a holistic process (Dimmock and Walker, 2004) and is clearly linked to the vision of a future and cognitive moral purpose (Fullan, 2005) so that action and decisions are made on a sound ethical base (Davies, Ellison and Bowring-Carr, 2005).

A further crucial distinction has to be made between "strategy" and "strategic planning" as the two terms are sometimes mistakenly treated synonymously. Strategy is perceived as a 'good' concept and is erroneously attached to several leadership and management activities. External evaluations of schools (eg. Local Authority advisers, OFSTED inspectors, consultants) sometimes misunderstand the concept of strategy by applying it to school development plans and school improvement plans which only run for a year (Davies, B. 2003). These so called strategic plans reveal the present problems but often fail to identify "the opportunities of tomorrow" (Davies, B.J. 2004). Davies and Ellison (2003) partition timescales into 1 to 2 years for the short term action planning, 3 to 5 years for the strategic medium term and 5 to 10 years for the futures-thinking long term.

Johnson and Scholes (2003) confirm the danger that strategy becomes thought of as the plan and are concerned that the plan is "a written document on an executive's shelf". In some organisations, they point out that the designers of the strategic plan may be removed from the reality of operation. Peters (1987) claims that there are no good strategic plans but there are good strategic planning

processes. All this criticism of strategic plans would seem to suggest that they are worthless. This is far from the truth: a well designed strategic plan, covering a period of years, involving all stakeholders, used as a 'living document' (Peters, 1987) and adapted to the changing circumstances of a turbulent environment, should be beneficial to a school's improvement. It is also important that strategy is written down, for stakeholders to refer to, review progress against and use as evidence of improvement to external agencies. However strategic plans should not be too long to be useful (Peters, 1987, Davies and Ellison, 2003) yet ironically in a high stakes accountability climate, thick documents are valued and judged as robust and rigorous by outside bodies. Paradoxically they are more likely to be consigned to the shelf, never to be read or embraced by stakeholders.

Of course what is of most benefit are the processes and approaches to the forming of the strategy, the discussions involved, the prioritising of intents and the articulation of the emergent strategy. Davies B. (2006) provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic processes needed to build a strategically focused school with a successful, sustainable future. He identifies three elements of strategic processes: conceptualising, engaging the people and articulating. The strategic process of conceptualising is important because it involves creating the time and space for leaders at all levels to stand back, catch their breath, reflect and engage in strategic thinking. It also involves strategic analysis identifying where the school is now, where it wants to be and how that 'strategic leap' can be led and managed, changing and adapting to new learning and creating new mental models for understanding.

As staff are the most expensive and significant resource in a school, 'engaging the people' is a critical element in creating long term success and sustainability. The use of 'strategic conversations' and enhanced participation and motivation engage staff and increase their strategic capability. 'Strategic conversations' (Davies, B., 2003) can include formal meetings of staff groups or individuals but more importantly are the unscheduled and informal discussions where learning takes place about strategic questions (Van der Heijden, 1996). This dialogue about whole school issues – trends that face the school over the next few years as well as the shorter term operational issues – helps to create a coherent view of the school, focusing on priorities and building strategic capability. Strategic conversations establish a common vocabulary, nurture reflection, build consensus and energize staff through participation in the vision, strategic planning and sustainable improvement. By empowering staff, they realise that they have some control or ownership and can make things happen (West-Burnham, 2004).

It has to be remembered that strategic participation is not confined to teachers but involves a wider set of stakeholders, including pupils at times. Strategic motivation depends on the trust in and the sense of purpose of the leadership of the school. Stakeholders have to be treated with respect and feel valued. They have to believe that their contribution is important and recognised and can make a difference. Involving staff and other stakeholders in strategic processes is difficult and time consuming and requires high levels of energy, yet it is key to their success (Davies, B.J., 2004). Johnson and Scholes (2003) point out that the process of engaging may be cumbersome and that some individuals or groups might contribute to only parts of it and not understand the whole. Davies B.J. (2004) observes that different stakeholders would be involved at different levels and to different degrees. Involving all stakeholders in all aspects of strategy may be a desirable vision but not a possible one (Nutt and Backoff, 1997).

The third element of strategic processes is articulating (Davies, B., 2006). Providing a strategic framework document is only part of the process: the strategy has also to be articulated and communicated orally and through the structure of the organisation for it to be translated into action. Everyone in the school needs to understand the major direction the school is taking and to be able to articulate the strategy to parents and the wider community. Specific meetings or groups for strategy, separating strategic items from short term operational issues at meetings and the use of strategic conversations all try to ensure that strategy becomes part of the language of the school. For optimum impact, the written strategy has to be broad and limited in the number of strategic objectives.

Davies, P. (1998) suggests that visioning, the process by which a vision is generated, is a powerful idea in moving a business forward while Kakabadse, Nortier and Abramovici (1998) conclude that "visioning is not a predictor, but a creator of the future" (p101). Flintham (2003), proposes that schools need vision, clearly articulated, to move forward but Dimmock and Walker (2004) express reservations that vision and school improvement planning are inadequate without strategic intent and a holistic, long term approach. Inkpen and Choudhury (1995) warn that organisations with tight controls, high reliance on formalised procedures and a drive for consistency may lose the ability to experiment and innovate, decrease flexibility and block learning and adaptation. This resonates strongly in practice with the first few years of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy so that alternative strategies are now required to make 'the strategic leap' (Davies, B., 2004) to higher levels of performance. To return to an earlier point and recurring

theme, to be effective, primary schools need to be successful and sustainable in both the short term and long term (Davies, B., 2003).

Strategic thinking supports sustainability by helping leaders rise above day to day management tasks and focus on the longer term.

> "'Strategic thinking' is the process by which an organisation's direction - givers can rise above the daily managerial processes and crises to gain different perspectives of the internal and external dynamics causing change in their environment and thereby giving more effective direction to their organisation. Such perspectives should be both future - orientated and historically understood."

(Garratt, 1995, p2)

Garratt's point about knowing where you are going but also knowing where you have come from is well made and resonates with practice. In 2000, when the researcher moved headship to his present school, a 1-1 headteacher's consultation – a strategic conversation – was held with every full-time member of staff. From the subsequent analysis, it soon became obvious that one strategic intent would be to develop leadership capacity, as the leadership role of senior management and subject co-ordinators were clearly underdeveloped. However translating strategy into action is not easy. It is a reculturing process, breaking broader aims into smaller steps, aligning individuals to the organisation's strategic objectives, involving everyone and changing their current behaviour to a desirable future behaviour (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). In terms of developing leadership capacity in the researcher's school back in 2000, this strategic intent had to be carefully planned and timed because of two contrasting past factors. On the one hand, the school had gone through a successful OFSTED inspection in 1999 and on the other hand, it emerged that the cumulative service of staff at the school was more than 300 years and staff were not used to change.

> "When change has only a present or future tense it becomes the antithesis of sustainability. Sustainable development respects, protects, preserves and renews all that is valuable in the past, and learns from it in order to build a better future".

(Hargreaves, 2005, p185)

As part of a long term reculturing process, certainly strategic conversations, reflection, articulating strategy and inviting participation have all helped staff to conceptualise the bigger picture and to move forward.

Emergent strategy (Mintzberg et al 1998) is a strategic approach which promotes learning by doing, over time. It occurs when an organisation is faced with a significant change and there is little understanding of the nature of the change or how best to implement the changes necessary (Davies, B., 2003). In Boisot's typology (1995), which also includes strategic planning, decentralised strategy and strategic intent, emergent strategy is placed in the low turbulence and low understanding domain. A process of learning by experimentation, followed by evaluation, then further experimentation, is used so that a pattern of successful experiences are built up and a strategy is formed. Less successful actions are abandoned. Emergent strategy is a powerful approach if the school is a learning organisation, with staff who are reflective and proactive. On the ground, 'strategy as you go' is viewed as more realistic than strategic planning, which is perceived as too prescriptive and considered only at fixed time intervals. However the approach has risks in that it leaves too much to the spontaneity of ideas and chance (Gratton, 2000) and it is associated with only incremental change rather than a 'strategic leap'. In practice, a school will choose flexibly from a portfolio of strategic approaches, depending on circumstance (Davies, B., 2004). Choosing the right approach or process is facilitated by the 'strategic learning cycle' (Davies, B.J., 2004).

"The processes and approaches centre on this cycle of learning from various experiences: evaluating actions, aligning the people with the decisions, choosing the right time to act, and taking action. The cycle is continuous. If the learning carries on, it enables the people in the context to use the processes and approaches to work towards the desired future".

(Davies, B.J., 2004, p2)

Of course this future can be adjusted during the cycle in response to change in the internal context (e.g. new staff), external demands or learning which emerges.

A further capacity to analyse for the successful, strategic and sustainable primary school is that of strategic abandonment, often associated with strategic timing and meaning "giving up some activities to accommodate the new ones" (Davies, B., 2004). Although it is only one of many strategic capacities needed to build sustainability, abandonment is given prominence here because its potential use may offer an innovative and unique contribution to conquering workload, being in control of external demands and exercising "informed professional judgement" (Barber, 2002). It would seem that schools have reached saturation point, expressed in comments such as "we can't work any harder" and 'something's got to go' (Lovely, 2006).

Intuition and judgement are needed to choose the optimum time to make changes. Caldwell (2004) suggests that abandonment, along with 'knowledge management', are integrating themes to ensure the success of the vision. Abandonment is as important as innovation; the two must be balanced. The capacity for abandonment is seen as one of five strategic priorities for schools by Caldwell (2004).

> "Particular attention should be given to nurturing and sustaining a capacity for abandonment as well as a capacity for innovation."

(p97)

Drucker (1999) calls for the systematic or organised abandonment of successful products, services or processes in favour of more promising, potentially better approaches. In analysing how some companies can make the leap from 'good to great' Collins (2001) found that these companies "did not focus principally on what to do to become great: they focused equally on what *not to do* and what to *stop doing" (p11).*

As an experienced headteacher, it seems to the researcher that the concept of abandonment could be appealing in practice to primary schools. Operating in a turbulent, unpredictable and stressful environment – 'running ragged doing everything' (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005) – responding to what many see as initiative overload and coping with change, which is complex and relentless, abandonment seems a refreshing idea to focus on core competencies and to strive for work/life balance. If a school is under pressure to take on too many initiatives, then there is a danger of losing focus and overburdening the leadership capacity of the school. Abandonment is a key strategy for focusing on priorities, making choices and operating within capacity (Davies, B., 2003). However 'giving up' or 'letting go' can be painful and involves difficult decisions. There may be a reluctance to abandon an initiative which has involved much energy and investment. Attached to such a decision, there is a risk to the school's success and the people who led the initiative may still retain a vested interest. In distributing leadership to all levels, Harris (2004) suggests heads may be reluctant to cede power to others, although Kelly (2002) reports none of the headteachers in her enquiry expressed concern about losing control. 'Letting go' will take practice (Lovely, 2006) and time but is inevitable as leadership is too big and challenging a task to be confined to one person (Gronn, 2003). Equally empowering people can produce astonishing results, higher than expectations (Davies, B. 2006). As part of workforce remodelling and work/life balance primary teachers have been pleased to transfer the '24 tasks' to support staff, although display has been

problematic with some resistance to abandonment. Many staff certainly still want to exert professional judgement on how the children's work is to be displayed, and some have retained the task as they find it therapeutic and pleasurable.

Strategy should focus on a few key objectives that will make a difference and the process of translating it into action should be kept simple (Gratton, 2000, Davies, B., 2006). This is where strategic abandonment is useful in setting leadership priorities. Writing about her teaching and leadership experience in the Capistrano Unified School District in California, Lovely (2006) reports that despite streamlining of the standards and accountability climate, "schools in the United States are still faced with too much to do in too little time" (p10). She advocates the use of 'selective abandonment' and 'intelligent neglect' to keep the eye on learning and stay on task. In setting priorities, activities and programmes judged to have the least impact on learning are abandoned to achieve balance and stability. This capacity removes a sense of helplessness and confusion triggered by rapid change on overstretched schools to ensure survival in the short term and strategic thinking about the long term.

Schools need a filtering system to cope with 'the information invasion' and prevent 'information fatigue' (Lovely, 2006) so that information can be turned into knowledge that sticks (Hadfield, 2005) and what really matters is retained.

> "Sustainable growth in public schools is realized when change and innovation
> are introduced in measured doses. Since the human mind is not wired to process
> information in gigabytes, educational leaders have to start abandoning tasks, policies
> and programs that no longer support their primary mission of learning. This requires
> disciplined action in identifying what to give up and what to keep."

(Lovely, 2006, p9)

Research in schools about the concept of strategic abandonment is limited and its use as a strategic capacity is underdeveloped so several notes of caution need to be expressed about Lovely's claims. Firstly, among school leaders on the ground, there are feelings of despondency at the impossibility of abandonment, and of conformity to initiatives directed by central or local government. Secondly it is important to get it right: there is a risk in 'selective abandonment' that good activities are lost and replacements do not come up to expectations. Thirdly, some decisions reached through selective abandonment may be frowned upon or disapproved by other stakeholders such as the local authority or parents.

Rejection is a second kind of strategic abandonment. Saying no to new initiatives and 'big opportunities', without feeling guilty, takes courage and discipline, as well as confidence, insight and discernment (Collins, 2001). It is particularly difficult where a financial incentive, such as a government grant, is involved. Rejection is most likely if the new initiative does not sit easily with the school's vision and is perceived as compromising or threatening its core purpose of enhancing high quality learning. The government's extended schools policy is an example of how some schools have embraced the initiative and are pioneers, while others perceive it as a distraction from teaching and learning and are only committed to minimum services in the medium term. In coming to decisions about rejection, schools draw on dimensions of strategic leadership such as people wisdom and contextual wisdom.

A third kind of strategic abandonment is what the thesis has termed 'opting out' or 'irresponsible abandonment'. This is where the headteacher or other leaders in the school know they will be retiring in a few years and so do not invest in the planning and preparation nor gain the personal commitment of staff to make the initiative a success. As a result there is a final dip in performance (Stroud, 2005), vision is limited and strategy is not translated into action. In the case of the timed retirement of the headteacher, a strategic plan or strategic thinking may be abdicated. In contrast, for continuity and sustainability, the 'selfless leader' would be grooming successors (Lovely, 2006) and planning leadership succession (Hargreaves, 2005, Fullan, 2005). Where a new headteacher inherits a legacy of 'opting out' abandonment and the school has a Section 5 OFSTED inspection shortly afterwards, there is some evidence that the 'domino effect' described earlier in Section 2.2 does not apply. If standards are judged to be 'inadequate' and the school is placed in special measures or issued with 'a notice to improve', the leadership and management could still be judged 'satisfactory' if the new headteacher has made a good start to address weaknesses. Given the importance attached to the self-evaluation form (SEF), the more frequent, shorter notice inspections and the greater accountability role given to the local authority and school improvement partners (SIPs), the likelihood of a school operating such abandonment and going unnoticed in the future is slim.

'Enforced abandonment' is a fourth kind of strategic abandonment identified in this thesis. This is where successful programmes have to be abandoned because of factors such as staffing changes, falling rolls, finance or external constraints. For example it may be desirable for a school to continue with an additional set for literacy and numeracy for example in Year 6. There is evidence that this has been beneficial and successful in that an enhanced teacher/pupil ratio has allowed more

interaction and personalisation leading to greater pupil understanding. Key Stage 2 results have confirmed the higher level of attainment predicted by teachers. In informal and formal feedback parents have noticed the differences made to their children and the provision is popular. However at a particular point in time, the provision is no longer possible because of financial constraints and its abandonment is enforced. In a similar way, other desirable initiatives may never get off the ground but are 'on hold', waiting for the right opportunity and timing.

Further research is needed into the nature of strategic abandonment to see if and how it is used in primary schools. In theory the systematic use of strategic abandonment as a tool can help primary schools to be strategic and sustainable by setting priorities and rejecting initiatives not compatible with their vision. Potentially strategic abandonment could benefit primary schools as a tool for workforce remodelling and self-evaluation. It is hoped that this research will make an original contribution to the understanding of the concept of strategic abandonment and its use in practice. The terms 'abandon' and 'abandonment' may be off putting and perceived negatively, associated with a lack of satisfaction or failure or viewed as morally wrong. To overcome this and promote it as a 'good concept', 'abandon' may have to be substituted by 'relinquish', 'eliminate' or 'discard'.

Summary

From this review of the literature, successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools might have the following characteristics:

1.   Effective leadership is crucial to successful, sustainable primary schools. It is the leadership of many at all levels, not just a single leader. However, the contribution of the headteacher, particularly the quality of his/her strategic leadership, is vital to primary schools being successful and sustainable.

2.   Successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools recognise the need to achieve good results in the short term but, in having high expectations and wanting the best for each child, resist teaching exclusively to Key Stage 2 National Tests. They show upward trends in achieving good standards over time.

3.   Successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools provide a broad, balanced, enriched and differentiated curriculum which promotes deep and lifelong learning and values thinking and understanding. They demonstrate that every child matters and consider children's interest and motivation, engage them in their learning and sustain positive attitudes.

4.   Successful, sustainable primary schools recognise the importance of the sustained contribution of staff in raising standards and nurture their well-being and professional development. They invest in people and develop leadership capacity at all levels to produce future leaders.

5.   Successful, sustainable primary schools focus on strategic processes and approaches which involve staff and other stakeholders in the strategic journey to sustainable success. There is a dual commitment to the short term and the long term. They may make use of strategic abandonment and timing as part of their self-evaluation system to reduce workload, to reject initiatives and to achieve work/life balance.

To investigate successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools, the small scale research needs to centre around five key questions:

1.   How do primary headteachers define their success?

2.   What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'?

3.   How do primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable?

4.   How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term?

5.   What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Research Methodology

The purpose of the research is to investigate primary schools whose success can be sustained long term. The research approach and design need to be 'fit for purpose'. In planning the research and examining the practical implications, the primary school headteacher has been identified as the key player. All five research questions – relating to success, understanding of the term 'strategy', strategic leadership, building leadership capacity and investing in people, and the use of 'strategic abandonment' – revolve around the leadership of the primary headteacher. To answer these questions, rich and illuminative data has to be collected, to gain deep insight into the complexity of headteachers' situations and to develop a holistic understanding of their points of view and find out why they say what they say in their own terms.

The research approach is qualitative as this provides 'the most appropriate fit' for a holistic approach, seeking depth and detail and generating new theories inductively (Fogelman, 2002). The research design is a case study, focusing on a single case, a school, and grounded in its natural context where the action is (Bassey, 2002, Schreiber, 1996). The research is concerned to elucidate the unique and particular features of the case, known as an idiographic approach (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, Bryman, 2004).

The interview is selected as the most appropriate research method for collecting the qualitative data from primary headteachers in that it is a fruitful source of information and a particularly useful and powerful tool, widely used and favoured by educational researchers (Wragg, 2002, Berry, 1999). The interview is inter-subjective (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2003) and involves gathering data through direct verbal interaction between individuals, allowing the interviewer to get below the surface and follow up interesting responses. Of the various types of interview (Powney and Watts, 1984, Cohen and Manion, 1994, Kvale, 1996), a semi-structured interview is adopted because the interview guide provides some structure and order yet it gives the interviewer flexibility to develop and probe responses. The research – both the general purpose and the particular research questions – are relevant to the researcher as an experienced headteacher of a large primary school, to other school leaders, to the research field (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005, Fullan, 2005) and to government policy makers (NCSL, 2006, OFSTED, 2005) and may contribute in a small way to the growing knowledge pool.

The chapter on research methodology is divided into five parts:

1. Research approach: qualitative
2. Research design: the case study
3. Research method: the semi-structured interview
4. Data collection and analysis
5. Reliability and validity.

3.1   Research approach: qualitative

Decisions about the research approach and research design are important as they provide the framework for the collection and analysis of data. They need to fit the purpose of the research and the research questions. Research approaches are broad orientations giving direction to the choices to be made about methods of data collection and analysis, but eventually they will converge to a narrower focus e.g. survey research or grounded theory (Silverman, 2005). The choice between different research approaches depends on what the researcher is trying to find out. If measurement is not involved, then the research design is usually associated with a qualitative research approach (Bassey, 2002). While the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research approaches can be ambiguous and problematic at times (Bryman, 2004), there are however fundamental differences in epistemology and methodology.

Quantitative methods attempt to explain human and social behaviour through the use of objective or value free measures and statistical analysis. They are essentially systematic and based on a positivist perspective, which assumes that there are social facts with an objective reality apart from the beliefs of individuals (Firestone, 1987). Positivism is an epistemological position which treats the social world like the natural world and so the concepts themselves, their measurement and the identification of underlying themes become the methodological issues of importance. A quantitative research methodology involves a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, tests hypotheses and seeks universal laws which explain and govern the reality which is being observed. This approach is sometimes referred to as nomothetic (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003).

Qualitative methods are built on a post-positivistic, phenomenological view of the world and assume that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation (Firestone, 1987). In its broadest sense, phenomenology is a philosophical point of view which advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value and is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them.   Subjective consciousness is of prime importance and the researcher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world. It is more interpretative and allows the researcher "to capture language and behaviour" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p46) and 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts in which they live (Myers, 2005) and to

communicate to the reader that understanding in the same terms as the actors (Firestone, 1987).

There are sharp contrasts then between the two broad research approaches. The role of the qualitative researcher is immersion, inhabiting 'the lived border between reality and representation' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997), as opposed to the detachment and neutrality of the quantitative researcher.

> "In contrast to what might emerge from laboratory-based studies of human behaviour, people's practices and experiences in particular educational contexts have been described as displaying uncertain, complex, messy and fleeting properties, which together call for distinctive research approaches to description, understanding and exploration."
>
> (Freebody, 2004, p81)

Qualitative researchers tend to be flexible and open, unafraid to draw on their own experience, learning to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty and recognising multiple possibilities for bias. They attempt "to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p5). They realise the complexity and variability of phenomena and of human action and that meanings are not easily fathomed but are defined and redefined through interaction (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The qualitative approach is more end-loaded; it is easier to start but categories emerge as the data is being collected and the analysis is considerably longer (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003). Qualitative researchers believe they gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the whole person than could be obtained from purely quantitative data (Silverman, 2005). However they have to admit (but this is part of their openness) that the research approach is inherently subjective at all stages from the selection of the sample to the multiple perceptions of various interviewees to the researcher as interviewer and analyst. This can leave the credibility and worthwhileness of qualitative research open to much criticism. Unfortunately policy makers tend to give greater value to research focused on numbers and hard data. Anderson and Biddle (1991) suggest that politicians, conscious of short term survival, want reduced timescales for research, immediate remedies and research conclusions consonant with their political agendas, with awkward findings conveniently ignored (James, 1993, Torrance et al, 2005).

In investigating successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools, a qualitative research approach is seen as the more appropriate for collecting rich data, gaining deep insight and developing a holistic understanding of headteachers' views based on the five research questions. The preference is for understanding through words and images, rather than numbers, for collecting naturally occurring data in a situation, which is neither highly structured nor unstructured, and for both testing and generating theory. In examining different approaches within qualitative research (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997), the research methodology veers towards 'naturalism', with its preference for 'getting out into the field' among the actors to discover meaning, and 'emotionalism', with its emphasis on interaction with research subjects to understand people's experiences. Both qualitative idioms make extensive use of the interview to collect data.

3.2   Research design: the case study

The research design also needs to fit the purpose of the research and the research questions and is framed by a qualitative approach. The research design represents a structure that guides the execution of the research method and has to satisfy the criteria of reliability and validity. In coming to a decision on case study as the research design, other research designs were considered but rejected as inappropriate.

An experimental design, involving an experimental group and a control group, would be impractical and not 'fit for purpose' in providing rich and illuminative data, while a longitudinal research design, collecting data on two or more occasions, was not feasible in terms of time and expense and not desirable as subsequent data would be of limited value. Decisions on rejecting experimental and longitudinal research designs were straightforward and obvious as neither were appropriate to the purpose of the research. However with other research designs – cross-sectional and comparative – it was not as clear-cut. On one hand, cross-sectional research design offered access to data from several cases, but on the other hand survey data, through questionnaires or structured interviews, often associated with a cross-sectional design, would be inadequate in gaining deep insight into the complexity of headteachers' situations. Nevertheless cross-sectional design could have been employed as a prelude to the research, for example using a preliminary questionnaire to be completed by headteachers and other leaders in a primary school. Data from this survey could then be used to select key informants to interview in depth. Time constraints and questions about the

appropriateness of the sampling strategy led to the conclusion that it was not feasible. It was therefore decided that a case study design was the most appropriate fit for the purpose of the research in that it focused on a single case, a successful school, the natural context for the action, and analysed in detail the unique and particular features of the case. However in examining multiple cases (i.e. 14 schools) the research design appears to be similar to a comparative design. But this is misleading: in comparative research design extreme or opposite examples are contrasted for their differences, whereas in this case study multiple sites are sampled on the basis of typically displaying characteristics in common.

Case studies have enjoyed considerable prominence as a research design in education (Freebody, 2004). A case study involves the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case and is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of that case (Stake, 1995). It is a specific instance which can illustrate a more general principle (Nisbet and Watt, 1984).

> "the single instance is of a bounded system, for example a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles."

> (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p18)

A case study is characterised by the subjects/objects of the enquiry (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and can penetrate situations not always susceptible to numerical analysis.

Bryman (2004) defines a case study as "a research design that entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case" (p 537). He suggests that the term can sometimes be extended to include the study of two or three cases for comparative purposes but seems to ignore larger samples in multiple-case studies (Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991, Large et al, 2005), multiple-site case studies (MacGilchrist et al, 1997) and collective case studies (Stake 1995). Bassey (2002) views an educational case study as an enquiry, which is critical in that it aims to inform educational decisions about improvement, and empirical in that its starting point is the collection of data. Although accepting that his 'prescriptive' definition entails some value judgements, Bassey contributes some important additions to what a case study should be. In recognising that the enquiry is set mainly in its natural context, where the action is and taking testimony from the actors first hand, he emphasises the ethic of respect for persons, truth and democratic values. An obvious, yet understated, part of the case study is to inquire into

interesting aspects of education, which are worthwhile and valuable to practitioners, policy makers or theoreticians. Sufficient data, not too much not too little, has to be collected to explore significant features of the case, to create plausible interpretations, to test for trustworthiness, to construct a worthwhile argument, to relate it to relevant research literature and to convey it convincingly to an audience.

With its emphasis on interpretative and subjective dimensions, seeing the situation through the eyes of participants, there is a tendency to associate a case study with a qualitative research approach. Indeed certain data collection methods used in case studies, e.g. observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, narrative accounts and documents, are identified with a qualitative paradigm. However, while exponents of case study research favour qualitative methods, some case studies can employ a quantitative research strategy, for example a survey on a single case using structured interviews. More frequently case studies can make use of both quantitative and qualitative research, working them in tandem. When the predominant research methodology is qualitative, a case study tends to take an inductive approach where theory is generated out of research. If the research methodology is predominantly quantitative, then a case study tends to take a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research: research is conducted with reference to hypotheses and ideas inferred from the theory.

The research literature contains various classifications of types of case study. In critiquing these types of case studies, it is important to analyse similarities and differences and to clarify and decide which are relevant to this research. Firstly, based on the single case of a school, the research is quite obviously an educational case study (Sturman, 1999). Secondly, descriptive, narrative and evaluative case studies are somewhat inadequate in fulfilling the purpose of the research and rigorously answering the research questions. Instead within the classifications, those which emphasise testing theory such as Yin's 'explanatory case study' (1984) or develop conceptual categories inductively such as Merriam's 'interpretative case study' (1988) seem the most useful for the purpose of the research. Bryman (2004) points out that case studies can be associated with both theory testing and theory generation (grounded theory) and Bassey (2002) links 'the theory-seeking/theory-testing case study' to fuzzy general predictions.

"It is 'fuzzy' because, instead of trying to state 'what works', it states 'what may work'; in other words it has built-in tentativeness or fuzziness."
(Bassey, 2002, p114)

Thirdly most case studies take place on what Bryman (2004) calls 'the exemplifying case' (p51), examining a particular case in order to gain insight into an issue or a theory. Stake (1995) refers to this as 'an instrumental case study' with groups of them, carried out to gain a fuller picture, called 'collective case studies'. The essential point is that cases are chosen because they will provide an apt context for the research questions to be answered. To investigate successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools, the thesis draws on a variety of types of case study from the research literature.

Case studies have a number of advantages and strengths which make them appealing and attractive to educational researchers. Nisbet and Watt (1984) report that the case study's strength is in reality, catching unique features, which would be lost in larger scale data, and embracing unanticipated events; results are immediately intelligible and more easily understood by a wide audience. Adelman et al (1980) confirm that the case study is strong on reality and down to earth, and pays detailed attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case; it is 'a step to action', starting in a world of action and contributing to it, and it presents research in a more publicly accessible form. Freebody (2004) notes that case studies as a way of conducting and disseminating research are more likely to have a greater impact, fusing theory and practice and linking to relevant literature. The strengths of the case study for Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) are that the researcher is integrally involved in the case and it blends a rich and vivid description of events with both the analysis and the report writing. The case study also recognises that 'context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p181).

Not surprisingly, the case study has also been criticised for having several weaknesses and pitfalls which researchers should avoid in their designs. To ensure case studies are systematic and rigorous, Nisbet and Watt (1984) counsel researchers to confront five issues: selecting only evidence which will support a particular conclusion will misrepresent the whole case; picking out more striking or sensational aspects distorts the full account and becomes journalism; over-emphasising detail and low-level illustration at the expense of seeing the whole picture degenerates into anecdotalism; accepting the respondents' views unquestioningly or only including aspects where people agree results in blandness; and

generating profound theories and verbose reports from low-level data amounts to pomposity. Case study researchers who favour a qualitative research approach tend to play down or ignore the prominence of reliability, replicability and validity, significant factors for quantitative researchers (Bryman, 2004). Case studies are prone to problems of bias and are not easily open to cross-checking. A standard criticism of the case study is that its findings are not generalizable (Bryman, 2004). Freebody (2004) criticises case study reports for being 'analytically light'.

> "Often reports of findings ………….. consist of little more than collages of fragments of observations, interviews and documents, with commentaries that link each fragment into the ongoing narrative worked up by the researchers."

> (Freebody, 2004, p88)

He sees the keys to the 'informativeners' of the report to be the transparency and theoretical adequacy of the analytic methods which move the argument from data to findings to conclusions. However, despite these reservations and conscious of its weaknesses, the case study has been selected as the most appropriate fit for the purpose of the research.

3.3   Research method: the semi-structured interview

Considering the purpose of the research and having decided on a qualitative research approach and a case study research design, the interview was selected as the most appropriate research instrument for collecting the qualitative data. The interview is a particularly useful and powerful research tool, providing a fruitful source of information (Wragg, 2002). The interview is inter-subjective and involves gathering data directly through verbal interaction between individuals, allowing the interviewer to follow up interesting responses and probe beneath the surface. Collecting data through observation was considered but felt to be impractical because capturing concepts such as strategy and sustainability through direct observation would be very difficult, except over a very long period of time. An analysis of school documentation, relating to leadership, success, strategy and sustainability, was perceived as useful but inadequate as the main source of data. However it was decided to request documentation, which was relevant to the research questions and not publicly available, from each headteacher, to supplement and support data gathered through interview. Several features of the questionnaire – greater reliability, access to a large sample, less expensive on time and comparatively easy to administer and analyse – would seem to render

it a possible instrument for the research. Of course the questionnaire is not a favourite tool of headteachers and has a low response rate.   However the essential rejection of the questionnaire, in favour of the interview, is conceptual. The questionnaire fails to get 'below the surface', to probe and give explanations and to provide rich and vivid data.   The ambiguity of language makes it more prone to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

'Interview' is a widely used term in everyday life. It has several purposes (e.g. medical, selection) and can be found in a variety of contexts such as the media, work and education. It is a conversation usually between two people, face to face, although it can be via the telephone or online. The purpose of the research interview is "to obtain information and understanding of issues relevant to the general aims and specific questions of a research project" (Gillham, 2004, p2).   Some interviewers, in setting the interview up with interviewees and during its conduct, may refer to it as a 'discussion', a 'conversation' or a 'chat' about a topic of interest. On the one hand, this is reassuring as generally the term 'interview' can have negative connotations (e.g. job applications, police questioning) and specifically it may be seen as threatening e.g. by headteachers (Wragg, 2002). On the other hand the danger is that the interviewee might see it as low key and low status. In general though the interview is 'a special occasion'; it is impressive how people are willing to respond and to work at an interview of no direct significance to them and it is surprising the quality, richness and vividness of the material which emerges (Gillham, 2004).

In educational research, the amount of structure in an interview varies distinctly, based on the degree of latitude given to the interviewee. Freebody (2004) identifies a three-part taxonomy: structured or fixed-response, semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Structured or fixed-response interviews restrict the relevance of the talk to a predetermined set of questions and, by inference, a set of possible answers, and make use of a quantitative research strategy.

> "Any materials outside that domain of relevance are not sought, not recorded and/or not taken into account in the compilation or analysis of the data. Structured interviews aim to keep the focus of the talk tight, the data collection focused and efficient, and the compilation of data straightforward."

> (Freebody, 2004, p133)

In contrast open-ended interviews are towards the opposite end of the continuum, with a few highly general questions or issues asked of the interviewee who is free to answer and direct

the talk. This approach aims to make the interview less artificial but makes the interview data less directly comparable among interviewees. Semi-structured interviews seem to take the best of both worlds; they start with a predetermined series of questions as an interview guide, establishing a core of issues to be covered, but at the same time allow some latitude in the breadth of relevance, freeing the interviewer to vary the sequence and pose further questions and the interviewee to lead on the content of the interview. In light of interviewees' statements, the researcher may also adapt or modify the guiding issues of the research for the next interview.

In his 'verbal data dimension' Gillham (2004) views 'unstructured interviews' as 'a kind of verbal observation' and places open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews close to each other on the continuum. He gives 'elite interviewing' as an example of open-ended interviews where the interviewee is in a position of authority, with considerable power and special, privileged knowledge of an institution or profession. The headteacher of a school is an example of an 'elite' interviewee. Bryman (2004) emphasises that questions are in the form of an 'interview guide', rather than an interview schedule, in a semi-structured interview, a term which covers a wide range of types. The semi-structured interview has much in common with 'the exploratory interview' (Oppenheim, 1992), 'the depth interview' (Oppenheim, 1992), 'the phenomenal interview' (Powney and Watts, 1984), 'the qualitative interview' (Patton, 1990) and 'the guided interview' (Berry, 1999) but differs in that it is more open in purpose and more structured, seeks description and interpretation, and is largely cognitive focused (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews are among the most widespread methods for collecting data (Silverman, 2005, Wragg, 2002); they are often seen as a simple and straightforward procedure for data collection, but on the contrary are 'deceptively complex' (Freebody, 2004). The credibility of the research relies heavily on the interviewer's management and analysis of the interviews to ensure methods are reliable and conclusions valid. The interviewer is so central to the research's trustworthiness that Gillham (2004) suggests 'the interviewer is the research instrument.'

Interviewing is a 'task of daunting complexity' requiring higher order interpersonal skills (Oppenheim, 1992). People find it much easier to talk, than to write, and it is remarkable what people will disclose if they feel they can talk to you, but the interviewer has to win their

trust and confidence by demonstrating rapport, empathy and respect. The interviewer has almost to "switch off personality", adopt 'a different social role' and be sensitive to individual situations (Oppenheim, 1992). He/she is prone to bias, and it may be easy to become too enthusiastically involved and ask leading or loaded supplementary questions which could render the data unreliable. In a similar vein, the interviewer has to be conscious that there may be a tendency for the interviewee to give a 'professionally desired' response to please the interviewer or show himself/herself in a good light. The interviewer has to deal with several unseen or 'below-the-surface' activities at once: managing the 'traffic', remembering, selecting and deciding on the right time to follow up promising leads, following the 'hidden agenda' and juggling the list of topics to be covered, and maintaining rapport at the right level and sustaining 'a receptive, permissive and non-judgemental attitude' (Oppenheim, 1992). Skilled interviewers demonstrate 'active listening', are economical with what they say and 'appreciate the active role of silence' in research questions (Gillham, 2004). Prudent use of non-verbal interactions such as facial expression, eye contact and head nods all help to convey the interviewer's interest and commitment and prevent the interviewee from misinterpreting the interviewer's passivity (Silverman, 2005).

Thorough planning and preparation are crucial to the successful management of the interview. Gillham (2004) breaks the overall structure of the interview into four main phases – the introductory stage, the opening development, the central core of the interview and bringing the interview to a close. The first and last phases are not central to the interview but are nevertheless important in shaping the interview content. The introductory phase sets the tenor and explains the purpose to the interviewee, and starts in advance of the interview. The interviewees should have a clear idea of why they have been asked, basic information about the research and an idea of the probable length of the interview with an agreement about recording, venue, date and time. In this investigation, all interviews were conducted in each of the interviewee's own school except for one which took place in the researcher's school. The 'efficiency' aspect of the interview (e.g. confirming what's been agreed on the telephone in writing), is important in avoiding possible confusion and making best use of valuable time and conveys the message that the interview is high status, that their co-operation and contribution are appreciated and that their rights and feelings will be respected. Similarly 'closure' pulls together the content and the 'social' element. It involves an element of reviewing or summarizing and a catch-all question "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about …..?." Thanking the interviewee and leaving a lasting good impression are

essential: although the interview is complete, the interviewee's co-operation is still needed to verify the transcript or possibly to clarify points in a follow up interview. In this research, there was ample opportunity for 'off the record' comments (Oppenheim, 1992) before and after the recorded interview. In addition, two heads gave the researcher a brief tour of the school before interview, and another head gave a tour after the interview. However very little of significance was added to what was mentioned in the interviews.

The 'opening development' phase covers some closed questions to gain background information (e.g. how long have you been headteacher of this primary school?), deals with explanations about transcriptions and analysis of data and establishes confidentiality and 'openness'. The 'central core' phase, which is the substantive content of the interview, follows the main questions in the interview guide with prompts to focus the interviewee's responses and opportunities for supplementary questions to probe. Throughout this phase the interviewer is in unobtrusive control of the conduct and structure of the interview but the interviewee is allowed to lead the content. The interview guide used is reproduced in Figure 3.1. After each set of interviews and interim analysis of the data, questions were refined and revised for the next interview. A significant change was made towards the end of the sample. For the last three interviews, cards giving the four kinds of 'strategic abandonment' as defined by the thesis were shared with each interviewee to supplement the question in the interview guide.

Prompts need to be developed from the literature review alongside the interview questions and listed as part of the interview guide to act as a reminder or trigger for the interviewer, who uses discernment to choose the right moment to prompt so that it seems a natural follow-on to the interviewee's response. Prompts help to ensure a degree of standardization, of comparability from one interview to the next and make the data analysis easier. Perhaps the single most difficult aspect of the interview is the probe in that it is impossible to predict when a probe is needed and what kind because it depends on what the interviewee is saying. The interviewer has to have a clear grasp of the research issues and specialist knowledge (e.g. being a headteacher of a primary school) to make decisions 'on the spot' and ask supplementary questions which best fit the direction of the research framework.

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<u>Interview guide</u>

How is your school successful?

> *How do you know?*
> *How do you measure that success?*

What do you understand by 'strategy'?

> *What's your vision/long term aim for the school?*

Can you think of times when your leadership is strategic?

> *When do you rise above the day to day stuff?*
> *With staff?   How do you involve staff in strategic thinking?*
> *With governors?*

What aspects of your school planning are strategic?

> *SDP/SIP?*
> *Other examples?*

How do you go about translating the strategy into action?

> *How do you make the strategy work?*
> *How do you 'walk the talk'?*
> *How do you get people on board?*

How do you develop leadership capacity in your staff?

> *examples?*
> *CPD opportunities?*
> *on-site learning opportunities?*
> *How do you share leadership?*
> *Conversations about the long term?*

What steps do you take to ensure success for the school in the long term?

> *How do you sustain success?*

In responding to new initiatives or change, have you had to give something up? Any examples?

> *Have you given up something successful?*
> *Why did you do it?*
> *Do you ever say no to an initiative?*
> *Why?*

Is there anything else you want to tell me about success, strategy or sustainability?

</div>

Figure 3.1 The inteview guide – main questions with supplementary questions

"Probes – and good questions in general – have the qualities of good writing: simple, clear, direct and potent. They need to be uncomplicated because they need to have an immediately focusing, directing effect."

(Gillham, 2004, p46)

Probing needs to be incisive but gentle, not interrogative, ensuring the interviewee is still in control, helping the interviewer understand and making the meaning clear. Reflecting is possibly the most effective probe as it offers back, in the interviewee's own words or selected key phrases, the essence of what he/she has just said and encourages a form of self-reflection leading to further exploration or development of previously uncoordinated elements. It can be genuinely heuristic with both interviewer and respondent surprised at the unexpected and unanticipated answers. Other probing techniques are outlined in Figure 3.2.

Probe Technique	**Example of probe question/statement**
Clarification	"I don't quite understand that."
Justification	"What makes you say that?"
	"Give me an example."
Extending the narrative	"Tell me a little more about ……."
Relevance	"How do those two things go together?"
Checking accuracy	"Let me see if I've got this right."
Showing empathy and understanding	"That must have been very difficult."

Figure 3.2 Probing techniques adapted from Gillham (2004) pp47-50

The interviewer then has a crucial role to play in the successful management of a research method which is 'deceptively complex' (Freebody, 2004). He/she has the difficult task of combining procedural skills, making best use of appropriate techniques, and the interpersonal skills of rapport, empathy and respect to sustain 'naturalness' and to encourage the interviewees to reveal what they know. It takes intuition and discernment to dovetail knowledge of the situation with knowledge of the research issues. Interviewing is a learning experience and requires practice to gain confidence and fluency.

3.4   Data collection and analysis

The sampling strategy has to be planned and deliberate so that the sample is appropriate and fit for the purpose of the research. It also needs to consider timescales and constraints. The purpose of the research is to gather and analyse rich data about how successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools can be created and led. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with headteachers of primary schools as they were identified as the key player in the organisation. Given the research approach and instrument adapted, the size of

the sample needed to be feasible, with a maximum of 14 headteachers interviewed, because of the time involved. Access to the sample may have been difficult, not because the content of the interview is sensitive but more because headteachers may not be willing to share the 'secrets' of their success. However a bigger problem for access may be that headteachers are so busy that they are unwilling to commit the necessary time or see the benefit of the research. This again highlights another skill needed in the researcher to persuade headteachers of the benefits, both personally and to the system, of the research.

Probability or random sampling, which would lessen the risk of bias and provide representativeness for generalizability, requires a much larger sample and therefore is not appropriate because of time and expense. More importantly, random sampling is not suited to the purpose of the research because its technique would fail to capture the key players. Instead non-probability or purposive sampling is appropriate as it is crucially important to identify and target the people considered to possess the rich data to be collected and analysed. Of course the very process of selection, including some and excluding others on given criteria, means that the sample is not representative of the population and results not generalizable. However, by selecting those likely to possess rich data about leading successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools, it could be argued that they are representative of the theory (Yin, 1994, Charmaz, 2006). Convenience most certainly plays a part in the sampling strategy. Proximity to the north-east region of England is a criterion but this is by no means a convenience sampling. Instead purposive sampling means that the key players are handpicked by the researcher, judged on the basis of typicality and convinced that the sample will satisfy specific criteria. The very process of selection testifies to its susceptibility to bias.

The task for the researcher of identifying the critical informants is problematic. Criteria for selection need to be derived from the literature review. Criteria for measuring a school's success is more readily available than judging its strategic and sustainable approach. Key Stage 2 results, both the most recent and over time, are easily obtained from the Department for Children, Schools and Families website (www.dcsf.gov.uk). Similarly checking that a school has had 'a good OFSTED report' is relatively straightforward. These measures are necessary criteria but also pose a dilemma for the researcher, who has been openly critical of KS2 results as constituting a narrow measure of success and has pointed out the discrepancy between Section 10 and Section 5 OFSTED reports as a measure of a school's success. The

strength of the sampling strategy – selection on the basis of typicality – could also be its weakness if that selection is inaccurate. With this in mind, further criteria have been added to strengthen reliability. Through local networks and professional contacts, primary schools have been identified by 'word of mouth' recommendations of successful schools who are well led, have a headteacher who has been in post for at least four years, promote deep learning and have a more strategic, sustainable approach. Headteachers, selected on those criteria, can then be used as informants to identify or put the researcher in touch with others who may qualify for inclusion. This technique is termed 'snowball sampling'. The criteria for selecting schools in the sample are summarised in Figure 3.3 while relevant and significant background details of the primary schools in the sample are provided later in Figures 3.4 and 3.5. While this sampling technique may facilitate access to the schools with the characteristics the researcher is interested in, it creates further levels of subjectivity and increases the possibility of multiple biases.

Proximity	Publically available data	Knowledge through networks and professional contacts
Primary schools (including junior) in the north-east region of England	▪ Good KS2 results or upward trend in KS2 results sustained over time (2002-2006) ▪ Value Added measures from KS1 to KS2 ▪ Judged successful in most recent OFSTED report	▪ Headteacher in post at least 4 years ▪ Successful leadership ▪ School promotes deep learning ▪ School is strategic in outlook

Figure 3.3 – Sampling strategy : selection criteria

This recognition of possible bias in the sampling strategy is part of the openness in which qualitative research is conducted. However, conscious of this, several steps were taken in this investigation to reduce the risk. Selection data was rigorously interrogated and triangulated between and with professional contacts and networks and publically available data. Recommendations made by individual headteachers, or local authority advisers or through network meetings were not accepted *per se*; long lists were reduced to short lists and many suggestions were rejected sensitively but decisively. The maximum take up of suggestions from an individual headteacher or local authority adviser was two. Many of the headteachers (10 out of 14) in the sample were actively contributing to system leadership through, for example, NPQH, SIP and NLE and this adds weight to the appropriateness of the selection.

Head	Gender	Local Authority	Number of Headships	Number of years in present post	School type and Location	No on roll	Date of interviews	Recommendation
P1	F	A	1st	6	CE (Aided), Town	216	13.07.05	H
P2	F	B	2nd	11	RC, Village	228	15.07.05	N
P3	F	B	1st	12	RC, City	281	11.07.06	N
P4	F	B	2nd	5	Community, City	360	06.09.06	N
1	F	C	2nd	8	Community, City	460	02.10.06	H
2	M	D	1st	22	Community, Town	187	11.10.06	N
3	M	D	1st	12	Community, Village	165	16.10.06	N
4	M	D	1st	16	Community, Village	162	09.11.06	N
5	M	A	1st	8	Community, Town	260	02.03.07	H
6	M	A	1st	8	Community, Town	210	07.03.07	H
7	M	E	1st	4	Community, Town	259	12.03.07	LA
8	F	E	3rd	4	Community, Town	350	19.03.07	LA
9	F	F	1st	9	Community, Town	484	22.05.07	LA
10	F	F	2nd	5	Community, Town	585	04.06.07	LA

P = Pilot

H = Headteacher
N = Network
LA = Local Authority

Figure 3.4 - Relevant background information relating to interviewed headteachers

Head	FSM	SEN	Other	KS2 Level 4+				VA 2006	Type	OFSTED	
				2003	2004	2005	2006			Year	Grade
P1	30%	25%	Deprived	247	234	258	256	101.2	S10	2004	Good
P2	11%	20%	Socially advantaged	269	273	300	275	101.6	S5	2006	Outstanding
P3	30%	25%	Disadvantaged	223	261	205	228	99.8	S5	2007	Satisfactory
P4	10%	15%	Advantaged 8% Bangladeshi	262	245	270	232	99.3	S5	2007	Satisfactory
1	9%	17%	Advantaged 26% EAL. High pupil mobility	256	264	280	249	99.6	S10	2003	Very effective
2	9%	15%	75% private housing Mixed backgrounds	281	287	277	248	100.2	S5	2007	Good
3	21%	20%	70% live outside catchment	267	300	267	267	101.3	S5	2006	Outstanding
4	6%	28%	Mostly private housing	267	267	288	257	99.3	S5	2007	Good
5	33%	30%	Deprived 10% travellers	175	201	226	242	100.3	S5	2006	Satisfactory
6	50%	40%	Very deprived	241	221	227	242	99.0	S5	2005	Good
7	0%	10%	Socially advantaged	252	262	283	283	102.9	S10	2003	Very good
8	33%	40%	Deprived	218	228	271	284	103.2	S5	2005	Good
9	55%	25%	Very deprived	202	182	215	234	100.8	S5	2005	Outstanding
10	10%	12%	Socially advantaged 25% EAL	240	258	246	262	100.9	S5	2006	Good

Figure 3.5 - Contextual and statistical information about the schools of interviewed headteachers

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Piloting interviews – a 'dress rehearsal' for the research – provide a 'reality test' for the planning and preparation and make future interviews more clearly focused and fruitful. As a pilot for the research, two interviews were conducted in July 2005 and a further two in July/September 2006. At each point, the sampling strategy, the interview guide and the codes were subsequently refined and revised. For all interviews, including the pilots, the purpose of the interview was explained on the telephone during the interview request and also at the start of the actual interview. The interview guide was e-mailed and/or posted to the interviewees several days before the interviews so that professionally they could be prepared and to minimise any 'risk of stage fright' (Field and Morse, 1989). Headteachers can be anxious, apprehensive and 'on guard' when being interviewed by 'someone familiar with their type of work' (Wragg, 2002). On the other hand, with the researcher being a headteacher, it is easier to identify with the interviewee's situation and once trust is established it is surprising what can be revealed. The amount of preparation varied greatly; some heads claimed they had hardly looked at the interview guide while others clearly had thought it through and made notes for the interview. One head gave the researcher a copy of his typed up answers. Interviewees signed the IFL Ethics Committee Consent Form and agreed to a digital voice record. During the interview itself, two headteachers asked for the recording to be stopped for a few minutes. One head seemed to have 'stage fright' and needed some thinking time; the other divulged some confidential information he was not prepared to have recorded. Several interviews were interrupted by a telephone call or a knock on the door; one interview was suspended for a parental interview and then concluded half an hour later. Attempts were made to move naturally from question to question 'maintaining the fiction of an interesting conversation' and to allow the interviewees to tell their story 'at their own rate of thinking' (Kvale, 1996), even when data was saturated (Scott, 1985). Interviews were fully transcribed and a copy sent to each interviewee to give them an opportunity to verify or 'amend the record'. There was only one request for changes to a transcript and accordingly several deletions were made.

Apart from the management of the interview, the other area which is difficult, problematic and time-consuming is the data analysis (Freebody, 2004). Having quite a clear idea how the data is going to be analysed before collection does help and again transcribing and analysing pilot interviews are valuable and essential learning experiences. Choosing and identifying categories is of course subjective. However it is not idiosyncratic, but is soundly organised through the researcher's immersion in the literature and all aspects of the interview. Constructing a meaningful analysis of what people have said, using categories to bring together what they have experienced in different ways in values or judgements about 'latent' meaning i.e. what they 'meant' by what they

said (Gillham, 2004) is difficult. The qualitative researcher has to "manage the tensions between reality and representation" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, p114). For this research the codes used for analysis are reproduced in Figure 3.6.

Succ ………. Success

Succ/attend	……	attendance	Succ/learn.env	……	learning environment
Succ/aw	……	awards	Succ/LA measures	….	Local authority measures
Succ/beh	……	behaviour	Succ/OFSTED	……	OFSTED inspection/report
Succ/br.curric	……	broad curriculum	Succ/par.fdbk	……	parental feedback
Succ/ch.catch	……	changing catchment area	Succ/prov.all	……	provision for all children
Succ/ch.lives	……	changing children's lives	Succ/pup.fdbk	……	pupil feedback
Succ/com.involv	……	community involvement	Succ/real.pot	……	realise potential
Succ/comp	……	complex	Succ/reput	……	reputation
Succ/consist	……	consistency	Succ/res	……	results
Succ/dip	……	dip in results	Succ/sh.lead	……	shared leadership
Succ/eth	……	ethos	Succ/sm.cl	……	small classes
Succ/ECM	……	Every Child Matters	Succ/st.app	……	staff appointments
Succ/ext.serv	……	extended services	Succ/sup.st	……	support staff
Succ/fac	……	facilities	Succ/w.sch.app	……	whole school approach
Succ/good tch	……	good teachers	Succ/Y6 teach	……	Year 6 teacher

St ………. Strategy

St/aband	……	abandonment	St/mot	……	motivation
St/comm.	……	communication	St/opp	……	opportunity
St/const	……	constraint	St/peop.wisd	……	people wisdom
St/cons	……	consult	St/plan	……	planning
St/cont.wisd	……	contextual wisdom	St/prior	……	prioritising
St/dec	……	decision	St/proc.wisd	……	procedural wisdom
St/def	……	definition	St/res	……	resources
St/dir	……	direction	St/resp.govt	……	response to government
St/fig	……	figurehead			initiative
St/gb	……	governing body	St/sh.term	……	short term
St/involve	……	involvement	St/struc	……	structures
St/lead	……	leadership	St/syst	……	systems
St/learn off	……	off-site learning e.g.	St/think	……	thinking
		courses, conferences	St/tim	……	timing
St/learn on	……	on-site learning e.g.	St/trans	……	translation into action
		coaching, modelling	St.vis	……	vision
St/longterm	……	long term			

Su ………. Sustainability

Su/belief	……	self-belief	Su/num	……	numbers
Su/burn out	……	burn out	Su/par.ex	……	parental expectations
Su/commit	……	commitment	Su/pass	……	passion
Su/comp	……	complete finisher	Su/relat	……	relationships
Su/eh	……	ethos	Su/renew	……	renew themselves
Su/fin	……	finance	Su/sab	……	sabbatical
Su/flex	……	flexibility	Su/staff	……	staffing
Su/govt	……	government	Su/stand	……	standards
Su/life learn	……	lifelong learning	Su/succ plan	……	succession planning
Su/net	……	network	Su/syst.lead	……	system leadershp

Figure 3.6 – Codes for analysis

The transcript of the interview was read and re-read several times to achieve a sense of holism and absorption. Codes were annotated on the transcripts by hand. A mixture of deductive and inductive coding was adopted to condense data into natural and manageable units of meaning. First of all categories deduced *a priori* from the research questions and review of literature were applied (Miles and Huberman, 1994). These were Success (Succ), Strategy (St) and Sustainability (Su), the phenomena being studied. These categories were then broken down into sub-categories deduced also from the literature review. Using these as a guide, which offers structure but retains flexibility, the raw data was analysed, underlining phrases, lines and segments and attaching them to categories and sub-categories, including where appropriate new codes. Microanalysis of the interview transcriptions was continuous and key phrases and sentences were assigned to a code suggested by their meaning.

Codes were kept as discrete as possible, although on some occasions, more than one code was attached to a specific piece of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Throughout the analysis of the transcripts, codes were abbreviated eg st/vis for strategy/vision. Periods of incubation (Bremner et al, 1985) allowed the researcher time to reflect on data and develop interpretations and meanings and during a subsequent re-reading, provisional codings were modified or replaced. A pair of researchers working together on the coding could have strengthened the reliability of the analysis but this was beyond the resources of the study. However an independent judge sampled the accuracy of the codes relative to specific pieces of data and checked the consistent application of codes, confirming that coding was credible and trustworthy. Coded data was then grouped, integrated and synthesised in memos, summaries and analytic statements to look for links, commonalities and differences, retaining a clear focus throughout on the research questions. Finally emergent patterns were interpreted for meaning and possible implications to build theory for action and theory for understanding.

3.5   Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are key tests of evaluating the integrity and credibility of research. The interview as a research instrument is "riddled with numerous pitfalls" (Wragg, 2002, p143) so it is vital in collecting and analysing data to identify, track, minimise and importantly report on possible sources of bias. The strength of the interview is the richness and vividness of data and the hallmark of the case study is significance, rather than frequency, in offering insight into the reality of situations and people (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003). The problem is that the relationship

between beliefs, knowledge and opinions, expressed in an interview, and reality is not straightforward and interview accounts do not 'reproduce' reality but 'represent' it (Hammersley, 1990).

Silverman (2005) expresses concern about the attempt to downplay issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research and to replace them with criteria like 'authenticity'. Reliability and validity come from quantitative research and are essentially positivist constructs.

> "The language of validity and reliability was originally developed for use in
> quantitative social science………… There has been some reluctance to apply
> those ideas to phenomenological …………research because they might imply
> acceptance of one absolute (positivist) reality."

(Easterby-Smith et al, 1994, p89)

This could be misleading as it can be argued that there is more than one and possibly several accounts of social reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Much criticism and at times scepticism of quantitative and qualitative research emanate from exponents of each approach. The discreteness of qualitative and quantitative approaches may be somewhat spurious and a principled integration of the theory and practice of the two research approaches may be desirable (Nash, 2005). For qualitative research to be credible and convince its audience, then it must grapple with issues of reliability and validity.

> "The questions of validity and reliability within research are just as important
> within qualitative as within quantitative methods though they may have to
> be treated somewhat differently."

(Brock-Utne, 1996, p612)

In examining and accounting for reliability and validity, it is important to be mindful of two provisos: firstly quantitative concepts of reliability and validity do not easily translate into a qualitative framework and alternatives have to be found and justified; and secondly quantitative concepts of reliability and validity, perceived as robust and rigorous, are not without weaknesses.

Reliability is the extent to which "a procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions" (Bell, 1987, p50). It demonstrates that the conduct of the research, such as the data collection and analysis, can be replicated (sometimes known as 'external reliability') with the same

results (Yin, 1994). Applying these definitions for quantitative research to an interview research method, then reliability depends on a highly structured instrument (Bush, 2002). By its nature, the semi-structured interview, adopting a flexible interview guide and making use of prompts and probes, compromises the positivist view of reliability. The distinctly human element in interviews is necessary for its validity but limits the scope for reliability. The irony of the quantitative and qualitative divide is that in the context of the interview the former may be more reliable at the expense of validity and the latter may be stronger on validity at the expense of reliability (Aspinwall et al, 1994).

'Reliability' then is a complex term and an issue in qualitative research. Hammersley (1992), in claiming that definitions of reliability contain a confusing diversity of ideas and substantial divergences among different authors, suggests that reliability "refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions" (Hammersley, 1992, p67). Applying the concept of reliability to case study research and trying to achieve consistency, Yin (1994) argues that "the goal of reliability is to minimise the errors and biases in a study" (Yin, 1994, p146) and that procedures should be fully documented so that 'a later investigator' could replicate the study by following exactly the same procedures. Silverman (2005) also points to documenting procedures as a way of confirming reliability when he observes that "many qualitative studies provide readers with little more than brief, persuasive, data extracts" (p33). However such replication would be expensive on time and commitment and its credibility is still questionable. Sapsford and Evans (1984), in emphasising that reliability applies to people involved in research as well as instruments employed, are nevertheless somewhat tentative.

> "………it should be possible for another worker to duplicate one's results or produce comparable evidence, at least in principle."

> (Sapsford and Evans, 1984, p254)

Because it is a 'one-off event' and not open to exact replication, Bassey (2002) believes that reliability is an impractical concept. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) confirm that case studies do not have to demonstrate the positivist view of reliability, but researchers still need to ask important questions – a series of fifteen in fact including 'What is reliable evidence?' and 'What is objective evidence?' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p185). Despite questions about the appropriateness, practicality and relevance of reliability to case study research, there is consensus

that it can not be ignored (Silverman, 2005, Bassey, 2002). Qualitative researchers need to achieve a form of 'reliability' through a modification of the positivist concept or through an alternative concept of 'trustworthiness' (Bush, 2002).

Trustworthiness refers to a set of criteria that can be used for judging the "quality" of qualitative research and is considered more appropriate than the traditional quantitative criteria of reliability and validity (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The trustworthiness criteria consist of dependability and confirmability, which are parallel concepts to reliability, credibility, parallel to internal validity, and transferability, parallel to external validity.

Dependability is the qualitative equivalent to reliability and examines ways of replicating the case study. It focuses on the process of enquiry and on the researcher's responsibility for ensuring that the process is logical, traceable and documented (Schwandt, 2001). Documenting the procedures and building up 'a chain of evidence' which is open to independent inspection and outside scrutiny strengthens dependability.

"The general way of approaching the reliability problem is to conduct research as if someone was always looking over your shoulder."

(Yin, 1994, p146)

Pilot interviews – 'dummy runs' on the collection and analysis of data – demonstrate careful, logical planning and sharpen up interviewer skills. Transcripts can offer a highly reliable record of 'naturally occurring' data which researchers can return to time and time again (Silverman, 2005). Noting apparently trivial, but sometimes crucial, pauses and overlaps in the interview shows evidence of a serious approach. High reliability is associated with what Seale (1999) calls " 'low-inference descriptors' recording data in terms that are as concrete as possible, including verbatim accounts of what people say……rather than researchers' reconstructions." (p148). As data collection and analysis are expensive on time the researcher is demonstrating investment and commitment to the process. A further strength is the interviewer's reflexivity, being conscious of possible bias and taking steps to reduce it. Language needs to be used succinctly and concepts (e.g. strategic abandonment) clarified. Building in periods of incubation (Bremner et al, 1985), reflection and review between interviews enhances the quality of the process.

Closely linked to dependability is the concept of 'confirmability' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) providing support for the correctness of the research. Confirmability is equivalent to the

quantitative notion of objectivity (Schwandt, 2001) and is concerned with establishing that the findings of the research have been determined by the participants and the context of the case study rather than the biases, motivations and perspectives of the researcher. Auditing or an 'audit trail' – a transparent trail that someone else, an 'auditor' or critical friend, can follow to see how the researcher reached his/her conclusions (Gillham, 2004) – is a useful procedure for ensuring confirmability. Bassey (2002) commends precise terminology for data storage and data processing. The total collection of notes (rough and tidied up), draft reports and final reports is called the 'archive'. The 'case record' includes agreed interview transcripts, analytical statements, interpretative writings and the day-by-day journal of the research. Access to these papers, too voluminous for most readers, supports the integrity of the research. The 'case report' is the endpoint of the case study and draws on the case record, citing it systematically as the source of data.

As the interviewer is central to the research's trustworthiness, in fact is almost 'the research instrument' (Gillham, 2004), the use of a trained or experienced interviewer increases reliability. Involving more than one researcher or a second person at different stages – the interview itself, transcribing the recording, applying the codes or challenging the findings – deals with consensus and strengthens internal reliability. In particular the use of peer review (Gillham, 2004) or an independent judge (Atkins, 1984, Hycner, 1985) tests the accuracy of the codes relative to specific pieces of raw data and the consistent application of codes to all cases. To check the 'fitness' of procedures in a case study and ensure complete integrity, Bassey (1999) has devised 'tests of probity', which are a series of questions to frame the research divided into 'tests of trustworthiness' and 'tests of respect for persons'.

Validity is truth and is interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena being researched (Hammersley, 1990). Several different types of validity have been identified by writers on research methods but the main distinction is between internal and external validity. Internal validity relates to the extent that research findings accurately represent the phenomena under investigation and external validity relates to the degree that research findings may be generalized to the wider population which the sample represents, or to other similar settings (Bush, 2002).

The semi-structured interview provides a deep picture and there are many opportunities to explain, probe further, make meaning clear, expand, deal with nuances and subtleties and clear up

misunderstandings. Although this makes the interview strong on internal validity, it has to be remembered that what people say in interviews is not the whole picture and that there are many ways to tell the truth about something (Freebody, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest five criteria of authenticity – fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity – but they have not been influential and are somewhat controversial (Bryman, 2004). Silverman (2005) is concerned about claims of authenticity in qualitative research simply on the basis that it represents experience and tells 'a convincing story'. For qualitative research to be authentic, it has to address satisfactorily the issues of reliability, validity and triangulation (Bush, 2002). In interviews the main potential source of invalidity is bias.

> "The sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics
> of the respondent and the substantive content of the question."

> (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003, p121)

Careful planning and formulation of questions and interviewer training minimise threats to validity, but bias in semi-structured interviews is impossible to eliminate altogether.

Credibility, one of four criteria under the umbrella term of trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), is equivalent to the quantitative concept of internal validity and is closely aligned with confirmability. Credibility assesses whether the research findings make sense, are meaningful to the participants and readers and depict an authentic picture. It involves a series of activities in the research cycle which increases trust and rapport, protects confidentiality and cross checks information with participants. The interview guide provides some structure which allows the interviewer to maintain control and offers shape to prevent rambling (Wragg, 2002). Transcripts, faithfully copied from the interview recordings, sent to the interviewees to confirm or amend, support credibility. 'Respondent validation' or 'member check' is used to gain feedback from the interviewee on the researcher's findings. It is often seen as an important procedure for verifying findings and ensuring that they are valid and meet the trustworthiness criteria of confirmability. However it has been criticised in that it is not clear how the procedure actually helps establish the truth of findings and that, by implementing a respondent validation, bias may be introduced. Member checks may be seen as more of an ethical rather than epistemological procedure, where it is courteous to feed back findings to those who have given their time and knowledge to the research. Fielding and Fielding (1986) point out that "feedback cannot be taken as direct validation

or refutation of the observer's inferences" (p43). Instead respondent validation has to be treated as another source of data and insight, which has to be analysed.

Triangulation involves comparing different sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena. It is particularly useful in case study research to corroborate data and confirm greater confidence in findings. The two main types of triangulation are 'methodological' which uses several methods to explore the same issue and 'respondent' which asks the same question of different participants (Bush, 2002). Triangulation between methods employs two or more approaches and compares their solutions to the same problem in an attempt to validate the outcomes of one approach in terms of the outcomes of another. Triangulation within a method collects two or more viewpoints on the 'reality' of a situation and attempts to accommodate, or account for, all those viewpoints (McFee, 1992). Silverman (2005) is critical of triangulation and not fully convinced by it as a test of validity. While accepting that triangulation contributes to validity, it is important not to overestimate its value (McFee, 1992).

External validity is sometimes referred to as 'generalizability' as it relates to the extent that research findings may be generalized to the wider population which the sample represents, or to other similar settings (Bush, 2002). Generalizability is a standard aim in quantitative research, usually achieved through statistical sampling procedures to give confidence about the representativeness of the sample which then allows broader inferences to be credible (Arber, 1993). A general rule is that the larger the sample, the more representative it is. Such sampling procedures are usually unavailable in qualitative research, for example the time consuming nature of the semi-structured interview predetermines a small sample size. Nisbet and Watt (1984) note that results in a case study may not be generalizable except where other researchers or readers see the application and Adelman et al (1980) suggest that the case study provides a 'natural' basis for generalization because it is down-to-earth and resonates with the reader's own experience.

Transferability, another criterion of trustworthiness, deals with the issue of generalizability in terms of case-to-case transfer (Schwandt, 2001). Sampling is representative of the 'case', not the population; researchers choose cases carefully on the basis that they illustrate some feature or process of the research focus.

"Many qualitative researchers employ ………purposive, and not random,

sampling methods. They seek out groups, settings and individuals where………
the processes being studied are most likely to occur."

(Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p202)

The sampling is theoretically grounded so that 'purposive sampling' is sometimes known as 'theoretical sampling'. In this way generalizations from results are both naturalistic and principled (Freebody, 2004) and are made to theory and not to population (Yin, 1994, Bryman, 2004, Mason 1996). Bassey (1999) refers to 'fuzzy generalizations' arising from studies of 'singularities', but if several similar case studies are undertaken, generalizations become less 'fuzzy'.

A further dilemma for the researcher in dealing with the issue of validity is the representation of the interviewee's account (the transcript) in the researcher's account (the research report). Rich data and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) are seen as the strengths of qualitative research but they can also be problematic. Some research reports tend to have an anecdotal quality, with an over-emphasis on detail rather than a comprehensive treatment of the data (Cohen, Manion and Morrision, 2003, Silverman, 2005). Mehan (1979) claims that it is difficult to determine the typicality or representativeness of instances and findings generated from them because researchers seldom provide the criteria or grounds for including them.

"There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of data in
relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations,
snippets from unstructured interviews ………are used to provide evidence of a
particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness
or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed."
(Bryman, 1988, p77)

Fielding and Fielding (1986) identified a tendency among researchers to select data to fit an ideal conception or preconception of the phenomenon and a tendency to select field data which are conspicuous because they are exotic, at the expense of less dramatic but conceivably indicative data. In contrast, Freebody (2004) notes the assumption that it is what participants' perceptions have in common, rather than their distinctiveness, that constitutes the notable 'findings'. Silverman (2005) advocates actively seeking out, addressing and reporting on negative, deviant or discrepant data which refute or challenge a developing theory. While validity is an important objective for qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) draw attention to the fact that validity is not an absolute concept and research is always susceptible to claims that it could have been better grounded or more representative.

For the purposes of the thesis, the researcher is mindful of this discussion on reliability and validity and through careful planning has applied the concepts discussed in order to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research. Conscious of sources of bias, steps have been taken at each point in the research cycle to avoid or reduce such bias. More specifically, the use of pilot interviews, modified interview guides, transcripts, peer reviews and some triangulation have strengthened the qualitative equivalents of reliability and validity in the thesis. Challenging success criteria for selection of interviewees and careful consideration of suggested or recommended informants were applied to confirm the sample was representative of the theory. To strengthen dependability, procedures were documented and a trail of evidence, available for external scrutiny, was collected. As well as the researcher's reflexivity, periods of reflection, incubation and review between the sets of interviews were used to learn from and improve the process of research.

Summary

1. The review of the research methodology has opened up and discussed a range of possible options for conducting the research to fulfil its purpose of investigating primary schools whose success can be sustained long term. In sifting through these possibilities, decisions converging on 'fitness for purpose' have to be pragmatic, balancing what is desirable with what is possible and ensuring that data collection and data analysis will actually provide answers to the five key research questions.

2. The research approach is qualitative and attempts to deal with the qualitative equivalents of reliability and validity.

3. The research design is a case study drawing particularly from the research literature on educational, theory-seeking/theory-testing, exemplifying, instrumental and collective case studies.

4. The research method is the semi-structured interview of fourteen primary school headteachers, using an interview guide which offers both structure and flexibility.

Chapter Four

Findings and discussion of findings

Findings and discussion of findings

Findings have been drawn from the analysis of the transcriptions of interviews with 14 primary headteachers, four of whom were a pilot stage, and from documents such as school development plans, mission statements and prospectuses gathered during the process. The findings are described and discussed in terms of the five research questions and illustrated with relevant quotations. The main findings are then briefly summarised. The six sections are:

1. How do primary headteachers define their success?
2. What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'?
3. How do they use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable?
4. How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term?
5. What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?
6. Summary of main findings.

To help understanding and provide a quick reference overview, the research questions have been placed alongside the sections in the literature review, the characteristics of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools and the main questions in the interview guide in Figure 4.1. Where appropriate, findings are referenced to key points in the literature review.

In the first section, the success of the primary schools in the research is defined both in terms of official measures and alternative, strategic measures and issues and concerns raised about success by headteachers are discussed. In the second section, headteachers' understanding and definitions of 'strategy' are considered. Strategy is discussed in terms of 'where to', 'where from' and 'how to get there' and how it links to vision, strategic planning, the short and long term and the success of the school. In the third section findings about how primary heads use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable are presented in the form of personal qualities and characteristics of strategic leadership, how headteachers work strategically with other key stakeholders and what they perceive to be their strategies for success. Ways in which headteachers invest in people long term are indicated and discussed in the fourth section. How headteachers build leadership capacity through creating on-site learning opportunities and capitalising on other professional development activities and the issues emerging are also considered, as well as how headteachers sustain themselves personally and professionally. In the fifth section, headteachers' use and reaction to strategic abandonment as a tool for sustainable success are analysed, examining the four kinds of abandonment identified in the literature review. In the final section, the main findings are summarised.

Sections in Literature Review	Perceived characteristics of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools	Research Questions	Interview guide – main questions
1. What is meant by success? 2. Centrality of leadership to a school's sustainable success. 3. Sustainability and its constituents. 4. Strategy and strategic processes and approaches.	1. Leadership is crucial to successful, sustainable primary schools. It is the leadership of many at all levels, not just a single leader. However, the contribution of the headteacher, particularly the quality of his or her strategic leadership, is vital to primary schools being successful and sustainable. 2. Successful sustainable primary schools recognise the need to achieve good standards in the short term but, in having high expectations and wanting the best for each child, resist teaching exclusively to Key Stage 2 National Tests. They show upward trends in achieving good standards over time. 3. Successful, sustainable primary schools provide a broad, balanced, enriched and differentiated curriculum which promotes deep and lifelong learning and values thinking and understanding. They demonstrate that every child matters and consider children's interest and motivation, engage them in their learning and sustain positive attitudes. 4. Successful, sustainable primary schools recognise the importance of the sustained contribution of staff in raising standards and nurture their well-being and professional development. They invest in people and develop leadership capacity at all levels to produce future leaders. 5. Successful, sustainable primary schools focus on strategic processes and approaches which involve staff and other stakeholders in the strategic journey to sustainable success. There is a dual commitment to the short term and the long term. They make use of strategic abandonment and timing as part of their self evaluation system to reduce workload, to reject initiatives and achieve work/life balance.	1. How do primary headteachers define their success? 2. What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'? 3. How do primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable? 4. How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term? 5. What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?	1. How is your school successful? 2. What do you understand by 'strategy'? 3. Can you think of times when your leadership is strategic? 4. What aspects of your school planning are strategic? 5. How do you go about translating the strategy into action? 6. How do you develop leadership capacity in your staff? 7. What steps do you take to ensure success for the school in the long term? 8. In responding to new initiatives or change, have you had to give something up? Any examples? 9. Is there anything else you want to tell me about success, strategy or sustainability?

Fig. 4.1 – Key information guiding the research

4.1   How do primary headtachers define their success?

All schools in the research had been successful for at least the last four years in terms of official measures of achieving good Key Stage 2 results, value added scores and OFSTED inspection reports.

> "I would say the school's successful in what is now nationally regarded as the measures. So as far as contextual value added, comparative data with benchmark schools, we would be statistically successful. As comparison across (local authority) schools mapped against expectation with socially disadvantaged schools, we have continuously out-performed expectation."

(Head 6)

However that had not always been the case. Most headteachers were quick to point out that they had started from a much lower baseline and could demonstrate improved results when compared to it, while three schools at one time had been in the OFSTED category of "serious weaknesses".

Head 2 cited being in the top 10% nationally for KS2 results and having value added scores well over 100; the school was now regularly reaching 90% for each subject at the end of Key Stage 2, compared to 20% less in other schools in the area. During his tenure, Head 5 had witnessed significantly higher value added scores, and dramatic rises in English threshold scores.

> "The next two years we won Achievement Awards ...... substantial improvement, from 30 odd per cent, into the 70s for English. Never quite topping 70% for Maths, but certainly into the mid 60s. But still, significant moves. We were re-Ofsteded ...... and we were removed from the category of serious weakness."

(Head 5)

As evidence of success in the conventional sense, Head 7 referred to the school being in the top 100 for value added in 2006 and a letter of congratulations from the Chief HMI for a very good OFSTED report.

While all the schools were clearly focused on achieving good test results and OFSTED reports, success to the leaders of these schools meant much more than this. Success was about a much broader perspective of achievement and about the all round development of children. "Excellence

and Enjoyment" (DfES, 2003) were key words to these leaders as they developed the strengths and talents of the children (Head 2) and ensured they fulfilled their potential (Head 7).

> "…… to be doing the best for the children ...... you want them to leave the school having achieved as much as they are capable of achieving, but also not having a narrow curriculum, having a more creative curriculum, having a good general knowledge and having the ability to access learning for themselves."

(Head 1)

Art, music, ICT and sport featured prominently in schools' provision for enriching and extending children's experience. Such provision included a brass band (Head 2), musical productions (Head 4), a visit to a London art gallery (Head 8), a regional gymnastics team (Head 9), "a fizzing website" (Head 7) and character and relationship building field trips (Head 4).

The "Every Child Matters" agenda was championed by all headteachers. Success to them was in terms of the all round development of the children, treating them as individuals (Head 2), making them feel valued (Head P4) and nurturing their well-being through whole school pastoral care systems (Head P3). Headteachers were passionate about the impact their school had on children and the difference they made.

> "I think we're more successful in a wider context because of the area we serve …… OFSTED did us the great honour of saying that we changed children's lives."

(Head 6)

> "The 'Excellence and Enjoyment' and 'Every Child Matters' just could be written for this school …… We were talking about this with the HMI and he said that it just shines through that the children know how important they are in the school, that they come first."
> (Head 9)

As evidence of success, Head 10 highlighted positive formal and informal pupil self-evaluation.

> "…… and it's very very happy for the children. We get such wonderful feedback from the children all the time. We've got a Guest Book on our website and it's just packed with …… 'This is the coolest school'. 'We love this school, we love the teachers'."
> (Head 10)

It emerged that the ethos of the school played an important part in success. Headteachers talked of creating a welcoming and calm atmosphere and a climate of trust where everyone was valued.

> "(The school's success) I would say is the atmosphere, the ethos, the inclusivity, the care and I don't think it is just the SATs. When I got this new headship, the governors (of my new school) wanted to come round and I took them on a tour of (this) school (as part of the interview process) …… it was really good because they could see and feel what this school was like …… at the end of the tour I felt very proud of the school."
>
> (Head P3)

It was felt, for some children, that this environment offered stability and contrasted sharply with their "chaotic home life." (Head 9).

Two of the schools (Heads 1 and 9) had local authority resourced SEN provision, which was part of their inclusive ethos and their success story.

> "We also host a support base for 10 statemented children who are in KS2. They're not our traditional children, they're bussed in from all round the Local Authority, children with learning difficulties. Some of our greatest successes are in those children and the achievements they make between KS1 and KS2 are phenomenal."
>
> (Head 9)

An integral part of a successful ethos it seemed was the relationships between the various people in the school community.

> "…… it's a welcoming school, the ethos of the school we feel is a very important issue, and it's about making sure when children come to this school, and parents, they feel welcomed. It's getting that over to people, that this school isn't just about results, but it's about ethos, it's about people."
>
> (Head 2)

> "the most important thing, I think, in a successful institution, not just a school, that's relationships …… If people are happy and enjoying their work, then you're going to get loads back from them."
>
> (Head 4)

This measure of success was less quantifiable but could be felt and observed.

> "…… the core business of the school is achievement …… but I wouldn't say
> that's the only way we look at being successful, so happy children, happy
> parents, happy staff, working well together and you can feel it in the school."

(Head 1)

Part of staff happiness was high morale and job satisfaction. For teachers and teaching assistants, this was about enjoying the job and feeling valued (Head P4) but also about seeing the progress children made, "a tremendous 'feel good factor'" (Head 4). Firstly leadership was effective and fulfilled in "getting the best out of people" and secondly, heads get a 'buzz' out of developing the leadership capacity of young teachers and transforming experienced teachers. Thirdly, heads felt flattered that staff were happy in their job and were reluctant to leave. Head 1 and Head 9 cited a huge response to job advertisements as evidence of the school's success.

> "The first time I advertised a job here I had 3 applicants …… nobody wanted to work
> here. But word of mouth is a wonderful thing ….. we had 90 this time. Now I know
> that's obviously market forces, there's a lot of people coming out now, but people really,
> passionately want to work at this school. They've heard about it."

(Head 9)

Parental support featured highly in the headteachers' views of importance in achieving success. They wanted parents to feel welcome and valued, have confidence in their school and take pride in its success.

> "Super parents. Some of them have huge hardship at home and a lot of problems,
> a lot of challenges to overcome, but in general, they want their children to do well
> and are willing to support the school in achieving that aim."

(Head 8)

Several headteachers reported excellent responses to parental questionnaires (Heads P4, 4, 5 and 8). It was also about the school's image in the community, extended services and community activities. Five schools (P2, P4, 1, 7 and 10) were oversubscribed and one headteacher (Head 8) had successfully convinced parents that the school should be their first choice, rather than second choice, which had been the case at the start of the headship.

Another measure of success highlighted by some headteachers was good behaviour. This measure of success was appealing to staff, desired by parents, commented upon by OFSTED and contributed to a calm ethos and the stability needed by some children. In particular, behaviour at break times had been targeted successfully (Head 4). In a similar vein, attendance and lateness had been successfully improved by one school (Head 5) through early morning sports activities and a sponsored breakfast club. Awards – for attendance, Arts Mark, Sports Active Mark, Investors in People and Healthy Schools – were mentioned by many headteachers as measures of success. They demonstrated evidence of a broad, enriched curriculum and gave external judgements to complement the school's self-evaluation process.

Although highly successful, all the headteachers nevertheless worried about dips in results and raised issues about the fragile nature of success. One headteacher of a primary school in a socially advantaged area, in what he called 'the no excuses group', was acutely aware of the consequences of the lack of success.

> "I'm well aware that we have massive support from the community and the governing body, but it's conditional support. It's conditional on that success, and that's in the back of my mind all the time, that if we weren't successful, then I would soon know about it."
>
> (Head 7)

At the other end of the spectrum, in deprived areas, successful headteachers admitted that achieving good results had been "a hard slog, really hard" (Head 8) and that "even if your results stand still it's a tremendous effort" (Head 6).

> "I liken it to rolling a boulder up a mountain: you might stop for a break but there's tremendous energy involved in stopping pushing that boulder up the mountain ……
> static results here are a success."
>
> (Head 6)

Three schools (Heads 1, 2 and 4) had experienced unexpected dips in Maths results and one school's value added score (Head 4) had fallen below 100 for the first time: they were concerned about downgrading in their OFSTED inspection if it took place in the next year. Two of the junior schools (Head P4, Head 5) and one primary school (Head 3) expressed strong views about adding value to KS1 results achieved in a separate infant school which was not accountable for KS2 results.

"I've got very strong views about that (value added). It's a system failure. The school next door …… is allowed to test at any point in time within parameters …… The other issue is there was a lack of moderation of KS1 results …… There is no way I can add value …… Nobody seems to want to grasp the nettle and yes it's significantly difficult for junior schools."

(Head 5)

It was interesting that schools in a deprived area (Head 5) and a socially advantaged area (Head 7) both gave cohort variability – that is the ability of one year group is different to another year group in the same school – as a factor in a school's fluctuating success. Several headteachers were also conscious of the impact on results of changes in pupil population. For many years Head 3 had attracted up to 70% pupils from a private estate three miles outside the village which was in a socially disadvantaged area.

"Once upon a time …… we had more of an imbalance towards children from more impoverished backgrounds, now the pendulum's probably swung in the other direction …… Big help that we've got as many middle class children from middle class backgrounds as we have, which I think contributes."

(Head 3)

Head 7 spoke of the success of inclusive practice of admitting a profoundly deaf pupil from outside the traditional area; however strategically he was conscious of a 'magnet effect' which could impact on results. Having a resourced SEN provision, whose results were part of the school's results, caused tension for Head 9.

"…… so in years when we have 4 or 5 children in there (Year 6 in the resourced SEN provision) …… obviously you'll appreciate that sometimes we start off at 90% before the others have begun, which doesn't seem fair to me, but they're an asset to the school. So …… if you believe in inclusion, which I passionately do, the only time I ever resent them is when the league tables come out."

(Head 9)

Head 5 had 'a massively mobile population' varying between 15% and 37%. This impacted on results in several ways but particularly in Travellers not being in school at the time of the National Tests. Head 4 was conscious of "a significant small group of children (with social problems) who came from the local council estate" and how fluctuations from year to year in these numbers could affect results. Head P3 attributed a dip in results to a change in pupil population caused by the absorption of children from another school which had closed.

A final issue emerged about success which has implications for the school system as a whole. Several headteachers, in talking about building leadership capacity, indicated that staff were reluctant to move on, even for promotion.

> "...... they love it here ...... people are very happy and we have a big social life as well and I think that's really important."

(Head 10)

> "...... in some respects I think it's too nice here, people stick their heads out, look at other schools and then come running back and say it's not like (name of school)."

(Head 1)

At school level, this is gratifying and indicates high morale and job satisfaction which have a reciprocal effect on success. In terms of growing future leaders for the system, however, it paints a more worrying picture.

For this group of headteachers, success was necessary for survival in the short term and for sustainability in the long term. They strove to be successful, were delighted to be successful and wanted that success to last. At the same time they were modest about their success and were constantly looking at ways to improve further. Their schools had achieved good test results over time which was very satisfying; however their concept of success was about much broader achievement and they were able to rise strategically above the day to day operations to ensure a balanced, enriched and differentiated curriculum which valued children's all round development, their thinking and understanding. Although very responsive to the accountability agenda of measuring success, they also achieved alternative, strategic measures of success, providing qualitative and quantitative evidence of children's enjoyment and happiness, staff commitment, morale and job satisfaction, the ethos of the school and the school's relationship with the community. Interestingly enough, all headteachers preferred using the concept of 'happiness' rather than 'fulfilment' when describing both pupils and staff. During the process of 'telling their story', it seemed clear that each headteacher's leadership had been central to the school achieving and sustaining success. Five of these school leaders, including three of schools at one time in "serious weaknesses", had been directly responsible for turning them into successful schools.

"I find it quite strange that you're interviewing me about being successful when five years ago we had everybody baying at our door because we weren't. It's the same people, the same school, same children, it's quite strange."

(Head 9)

Drawing on strategic wisdom about context and people, the headteachers appeared to balance the paradoxical demands for success of parents and government and satisfy the expectations of all stakeholders. For all these headteachers, achieving good test results over time was difficult and required enormous effort; it also raised several issues over the nature of success. Only one headteacher hinted that there may be a 'ceiling' to Key Stage 2 results.

"We are at our absolute threshold now of maximum possible results …… We are killing ourselves year on year to get these results …… To keep these results when the intake is getting poorer."

(Head 6)

4.2 What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'?

Headteachers in the research found the term 'strategy' somewhat elusive and difficult both to grasp and to define and their articulation varied greatly. They were not at ease talking in abstract or philosophical terms and much preferred to focus on practical concepts and concrete examples. Direction setting is the most common definition of strategy (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005) and most headteachers confirmed this, using imagery of 'route' to reach an aim (Head P1) and 'way' to achieve a goal (Head 8). Head 6 used both military and nautical imagery.

"…… strategy is realising your vision. A battle plan in order to realise a vision, or bridging the rhetoric reality gap. I take a different view of 'strategy' as I do to a school (development) plan, or a set of aims, or a particular improvement structure for one area or one subject. I take strategy to be how all these things link together …… more a case of the direction the ship is sailing in as opposed to the cut of the jib …… and how one thing will have the domino effect on another. That's what I view as strategy."

(Head 6)

Head P2 also associated 'strategy' with military action, and like a few headteachers (Heads P1, 4) with national and local authority strategies.

> "Planning ahead, seeing the minefields and difficulties, trying to work out a
> solution in advance, making a planned response to government initiatives."
> (Head P2)

Head P1 felt that "people use the word 'strategy' very loosely" and the term was overused in government literature.

> "We have so many strategies – Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, attendance and behaviour ……
> I think sometimes we lose, you know, what is a strategy."
>
> (Head P1)

While three headteachers demonstrated their understanding through specific national strategies or concrete examples such as TLR structure and succession planning, all the other headteachers interpreted 'strategy' as a holistic concept involving direction setting and planning ahead, linking it to vision and seeing it as long term. Several school leaders emphasised that the plan was flexible and subject to change.

> "As I understand it, or as the way I apply it, it's a considered flexible plan to manoeuvre
> yourself to your desired destination."
>
> (Head 3)

> "…… but I think the plan changes, the goal posts change, also people change,
> regulations and new developments come in."
>
> (Head 10)

Although the plan was flexible and change expected, that change nevertheless was unpredictable which could lead to frustration.

> "You can plan things well in advance but because of circumstances beyond your
> control you have to change them, which is frustrating."
>
> (Head P2)

'Strategy' was about 'knowing where you want to be' and in this way linked with vision.

> "…… things you want to achieve in the longer term. It's almost the opposite of
> the urgent and reactive stuff, the things you've got to deal with every day. The
> strategy is way beyond that in terms of where you want to be in …… it may be a
> number of years timescale."
> (Head 7)

All headteachers were able to articulate their vision; it related to the all round development of the child (Head 4), developing young citizens (Head 2), wanting the best from the children (Head 1), having high expectations (Heads P1, 2) and providing opportunities and challenge (Head 4). Three headteachers (Heads 1, 3 and 5) judged their vision with a moral purpose by asking themselves "Would I be happy for my child/children?" Vision was part of 'strategy' and very clearly linked to success. Head 10 spoke of her first letter to parents when she took up the headship.

> " 'My aim is to be a centre of excellence where people really really want to send their children and you feel confident to do so'".

> (Head 10)

At the same time, she admitted that her quantitative goal would be to achieve the 'outstanding' grade in the next OFSTED inspection, the school having narrowly missed it in the last one. Head 8's vision was about self-belief, removing barriers and challenging everyone in the school community to believe in themselves.

> "…… getting the staff to believe that the children can achieve, getting the parents to believe that they can achieve as well, and having aspirations for their children. So long term goals when I came here, that was probably number one priority."

> (Head 8)

In general, vision and strategy tended not to be written down. Two headteachers (Heads 1 and 10) pointed to curriculum aims set out in the school prospectus; they encompassed their vision but were rather lengthy. Head 3 had a Strategic Vision Statement linked to nine Foundation Statements about ethos, standards, teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment, extra curricular activities, pupils, community, leadership and management and resources. He felt the Strategic Vision Statement explained "in a nutshell what the school was about …… our main purpose."

> "To provide a positive, challenging, caring, high quality teaching and learning environment, where each child is encouraged and extended to achieve their academic and personal potential."
>
> (Head 3)

Some schools used Mission Statements to communicate their vision to all stakeholders, while Heads 6 and 10 had rejected them because they were 'full of clichés'.

"Our Mission: aim high, be honest, work together, enjoy what we do, look after what we have."

(Head 8)

"Mission Statement: We provide an inspiring, caring environment, in which we are all challenged to maximise our potential."

(Head 7)

Head 7 was quick to point out that the challenge was not just for children, but for teachers, non-teaching staff and governors.

'Strategy' was 'knowing where you were going to' (Head P4) but for these headteachers it was also about understanding where you had come from.   Many headteachers demonstrated historical understanding (Garratt, 1995, Hargreaves, 2005) and contextual wisdom (Davies, B.J. 2004), as well as showing how a change of leadership was central to the school's success.

"I need to go back really to before I was appointed. There was a Headteacher in place who had applied for early retirement three times, and been refused …… and what happened as a result of that was ……"

(Head 10)

"I'll have to go back historically …… When I came to (name of school) …… I was joking and saying nobody else wanted the job, but that was actually true. (Name of school) had achieved a very poor reputation in the community and in the local authority. The previous Head had left under a cloud ……"

(Head 9)

'Strategy' was also about knowing "how we're going to do it" (Head 6) and how to involve others in that process.

"It's about thinking well ahead …… long term vision for the school. It's almost like prediction, knowing where you want to go, predicting when you'll get there and looking at how you'll do that, and it's not just me, it's a team."

(Head P4)

"It's about having a long term aim and goal, but knowing the steps along the way, and managing the people to take them with you."

(Head 10)

Strategy was seen by some headteachers as a long term means of reculturing the school to one of high expectations of the children and each other, to create a school that was never content with its standards.

> "Nothing's ever good enough, and yes we do a lot of celebrating success, but all the time we're looking to see what we can do to improve this. All the staff know we're not a school that stands still and that's part of the culture in our school …… it takes a long time to build up."
>
> (Head P1)

In articulating her understanding of the term 'strategy', Head 1 explained the roles of two key teams.

> "We think of the Leadership Team as being the people who have the long term vision, this is where the school's going in ten, fifteen years time, this is what we want the school to be like. The Strategy Team, we sit down and we plan how we're going to get there …… in the nitty gritty of it, we probably don't look so far ahead, we probably look in two or three years in the Strategy Team …… at what we're going to have to do with staff to help them to see the vision and get there, and see the big picture."
>
> (Head 1)

When answering the question "What aspects of your school planning are strategic?" (Figure 4.2), all headteachers referred to School Management Plans, School Development Plans or School Improvement Plans. However the timescales for these plans varied greatly and did not fit neatly into 1 to 2 years for short term action planning, 3 to 5 years for the strategic medium term and 5 to 10 years for the futures-thinking long term (Davies and Ellison, 2003). Amongst headteachers, there was a mixture of flexibility, confusion and frustration. Some headteachers wrote the 2nd year, 3rd year and other years of the plan in broad outline and accepted that the strategic elements would be changed, modified or refined over time (Heads P1, P4, 1, 3, 4, 9, 10). They could predict that new priorities might emerge and understood they could not predict what they were. Some specific targets e.g. Writing and Assessment for Learning had started off as 1 year plans but had become continuous for several years. Other headteachers (Heads P2, 6, 7) seemed to think that Years 2, 3 and more had to be in detail and, because this was unreasonable to predict and "things change so dramatically", had made a clear decision to stop.

"In the past I tried to have a 3 year plan but it never works …… new initiatives ……
throw any plan you may have had out of sync."

(Head P2)

Head	Short, medium and long term planning
P1	3 years – 2nd and 3rd years "broad broad statements."
P2	1 year. Had tried 3 years plan but stopped.
P3	2 years. 2nd year 'broad outline'. Has to be 'a living document'.
P4	3 years. 2nd and 3rd year 'very broad brush stroke'.
1	3 years. 2nd and 3rd year in detail but named "Future Plans".
2	3 years. 1st year short term. 2nd and 3rd years strategic.
3	Flexible, concurrent model. Developments vary – 1 year, 2 years, 5 years and 10 years.
4	2 years. 2nd year sometimes becomes 3rd year.
5	2 years. Objectives need to be prioritised and limited in number.
6	2 years – reasonable to predict. 3rd year "pie in the sky".
7	1 year. Further years are discussed, but not written down.
8	1 year. Some targets continue into next year and "move up a level".
9	2 years short term. 3 to 5 years for medium and long term.
10	2 years. Some targets continue into 3rd year "moving it to next level".

Figure 4.2 – "What aspects of your school planning are strategic?"

Written strategic plans, because of the misconception about detail, were seen as a problem for those headteachers, rather than a challenge or opportunity, and this had led to frustration. Headteachers perceived it as a waste of their time but also, in an accountability climate, there was a moral dimension that the headteacher could be criticised for not fulfilling the plan or getting it wrong. Despite, in many cases, a lack of written strategic planning, strategic thinking and discussion clearly took place.

"…… in terms of strategy, I think that everybody associated with this school is
maintaining this high challenge …… that's the strategic thinking that goes on all
the time."

(Head 7)

While having an overall or larger overarching strategy, headteachers also used specific or smaller focused strategies. These strategies could be reactive and proactive and linked the short term actions to the longer term strategy. Reactive strategies were interventions in response to an issue or problem identified in monitoring and evaluation systems e.g. a dip in results, underperformance of a teacher. They were short term, urgent and necessary to achieve or protect success. It could also involve a change in leadership style in order to give more effective direction to staff. At the 'strategic intervention point' (Davies, 2006) of becoming the headteacher of a school in "serious weaknesses", Head 9 felt she needed to adopt a more autocratic style of leadership.

> "I saw that the staff wanted somebody to lead them. So my style of leadership then was totally different to my style of leadership now …… because there wasn't time to prevaricate …… a much more democratic approach …… wasn't an option that was available …… I had to come in and say 'Right, we're going to do this, this and this'. And actually they liked that style of leadership at the time because they were sick of people having endless meetings discussing things."

> (Head 9)

Head 1 reacted quickly and decisively to a dip in Maths results.

> "…… there were twelve or thirteen children who I thought …… half of them should have got Level 4, and the reason they didn't was because they didn't have the mental arithmetic strategies. I felt that had been a bit of a weakness throughout KS2 …… and (teachers) had thrown out a little bit of common sense. And so, I said to them that I wanted to reintroduce tables, mental arithmetic tests on a regular basis. And we talked around it, and some year groups wanted to set, some year groups wanted to do it over a fortnight and I said 'Look, everybody's doing it on a Friday'."
> (Head 1)

This reactive strategy contrasted sharply with leadership response in unsuccessful schools, as witnessed by Head 7 during his contribution to system leadership.

> "I believe that some headteachers have a certain state of paralysis …… through working in schools in 'special measures' where they actually know there's a problem and don't do anything about it."

> (Head 7)

Although these strategies were reactive, the headteachers involved were proactive in keeping their strategic vision in mind at all times and linking short term reactions to long term strategy. They

used strategy as a perspective to view the future but also as a template to direct, monitor and evaluate current actions (Davies B. 2005). Head 8 used improvement in Science results as a specific, short term strategy which was linked to the overall strategy. The school put in extra resources, time and effort to achieve much improved Science results; however it was more about 'the bigger picture' of self-belief, wanting the children (and other stakeholders) to realise they could do it and aim high in all subjects.

> "Well, I'd done it because it was about the self-esteem thing. I wanted children
> to think they could do it and …… Science is quite a quick fix, isn't it? …… so
> we got children who were achieving Level 4 and Level 5 in Science who had been
> thinking 'I can't do it, I just can't do it' …… and there's been a real knock-on effect."

(Head 8)

Several heads mentioned that the strategy was "effectively in the back of our minds" (Head 3) and seized the opportunity to promote it in conversations at break and lunch time (Head 10). Some heads were constantly proactive in their strategic thinking and ensuring their success was sustainable.

> "…… one of the things that makes us successful is that we keep an eye on what's
> going on, we're always looking to see what's going to hit us next, in order that
> we're prepared for it …… Anything that the government throws at you ……
> If you keep abreast of what's going on …… and you can read about it, you're in
> a much better position."

(Head 10)

Head 7 had discussed with the Chair of Governors the impact of the school's success with children with severe special needs and how attracting more could alter "the demographics within the school."

> "…… there's a limit to what you can do before you actually affect what people are
> coming for really. So that in itself is a strategy, it's really protecting, sustaining what
> we have at the moment."

(Head 7)

4.3   How do primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable?

The headteachers in the research were selected for fitting the criteria of being effective leaders of successful schools. They had a track record of success; for four Heads (P2, P4, 1 and 10) this was their second headship and for one (Head 8) this was her third headship; another four Heads (P3, 2, 3 and 4) had sustained success in excess of 12 years. The thesis has argued that leadership is central to a school's success; for three Heads (5, 6 and 9) in the sample, who took their schools out of "serious weaknesses", leadership seemed quite literally to make the difference between success and failure. Two of them in particular (Heads 6 and 9) were able to vary their leadership style to the context (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003) and strategically link short term expedients to longer term strategy. Several Heads (5, 6, 7, 9, 10) on taking up appointment, discerned that staff wanted to be led.

> "I've been fortunate …… to have inherited some very good staff from the previous Head, who were really just ripe for pointing in the right direction. And you set the ball rolling and they've been so brilliant."

(Head 10)

In analysing how primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable, their responses in interview have been shaped into the personal qualities and characteristics they exhibit, how they work strategically with key staff and with governors and what they believe are their strategies for success.

4.3.i   Personal qualities and characteristics of strategic leadership

Although, from what they said, their tone of voice and facial expression, it was clear that these headteachers felt the turbulence, the relentlessness, the stress and the pressures of the job, they nevertheless remained positive and proud of their achievements and were passionate about leading and learning.

> "Because I think a lot of Heads go around saying 'You don't want to do this job!' Moan, moan, moan. I am completely the other way around saying 'This is the best job in the world!' I love every minute of being Head here. And I'm sure the staff know that."

(Head 9)

"I love what I do. And I love thinking about what we're going to do next, and I love reading about it."

(Head 10)

Not all the headteachers were as demonstrative as this, but they expressed a desire to do their best in all they did and seemed to find the job "exhilarating" (Caldwell, 2007). They had high expectations and wanted the best for children (Hill, 2006).

"…… every time I have a hard problem to tackle …… I say to staff 'I am here for the children of this school'. I think the world of my staff and the whole community of staff, but at the end of the day I'm here for the children first and foremost."

(Head 8)

They demonstrated 'instructional leadership' (Blase and Blase, 1998), with a good picture of what was happening in classrooms.

Headteachers created a 'can do culture' where, whatever the problem, they would find a solution. They talked in terms of having 'self-belief', 'faith' or 'conviction' that they were 'making a difference' or 'adding value'. They were able to exercise influence over others in the organisation (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003), directly and indirectly (Hallinger and Heck, 1999) and to motivate and inspire staff and children to higher levels of performance. They invested in people and built leadership capacity, promoting positive relationships of trust, giving people confidence and empowering them; they modelled the capacities they wanted others to exhibit and spotted talent, wanting to get the best out of non-teaching staff as well as teachers. A further significant point is that they also showed rapport with the reality of the classroom (Head 9) and remembered to thank everyone and appreciate their efforts (Head 4).

Many headteachers emphasised 'the people skills', "having that nous of understanding people" (Head 8), which helped translate the strategy into action and contributed to sustainability. For these headteachers, this 'people wisdom' (Davies, B.J., 2004) seemed to triangulate with 'contextual wisdom' (Davies, B.J., 2004) and 'historical understanding' (Garratt, 1995, Hargreaves, 2005).

"I think that helped, that confidence and that knowledge, they (the staff) needed somebody who was going to not only send them in the right direction, but look after them as well because they'd been bruised (after a disappointing OFSTED

inspection with the previous headteacher) …… that's what I mean about the people things."

(Head 10)

Head 10 also discerned the crucial difference between autonomy and capacity (Fullan, 2005).

"…… people were given a lot of power, really. Allowed to do their own thing.
So what I inherited were people who had quite a lot of …… not leadership skills
as such, but were used to acting on their own initiative. And getting on and
doing, but very little cohesion. So everybody was going off in different directions."

(Head 10)

The headteachers demonstrated strategic wisdom about the context they operated in and about the people they worked with, and had a very clear understanding of where they had come from.

At various times, heads described themselves as "determined", "single minded", "resolute" and 'focused'. They were certainly "not complacent" (Head 2) and exhibited restlessness (Davies, 2006) in their approach to success, committed to improving children's lives. They were proactive and reactive and acted strategically to prioritise and to ensure, protect and sustain success. They were not frightened to tackle within-school variation and challenge staff to do their best.

"…… there were two teachers last year …… there were some issues identified
effectively in their performance …… but these issues were resolved because
we had the difficult conversations …… full marks they've both come through
that and the right result at the end."

(Head 7)

Relationships took much time to build up, but getting them right paid dividends in the long term.

"…… you can say things to staff that they're not going to like, but they know why
you said it. If you invest in relationships, at times when tough things have to be said,
you can say them ……"

(Head P1)

Headteachers also had the confidence to openly admit to staff that they were 'human' and got some things wrong.

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> "That's important in being a leader as well, showing that you don't get it right all the time and you do make mistakes."

(Head 10)

Some heads felt staff and children could detect if they were not sincere and honest, and expressed humility, putting the good of the school before their own needs (Collins, 2001).

> "I don't see it (distributing leadership) as handing over power because my ego in that respect is not that big. I'm quite happy for someone else to get the credit for something because ultimately the school gets the credit and that's enough for me."

(Head 3)

Heads needed high levels of energy and stamina, occasionally to the detriment of well-being.

> "I was quite ill last year. The job is so demanding that if you don't get any quality time you simply come back and you're ready to be worn out again. I get exceptionally tired doing this job."

(Head 5)

It was important to "set the right pace" for the strategy and complete it.

> "In the context of sustainability, what often concerns me is the number of people who get into jobs and they're starters and middlers but not finishers ...... now I'm beginning to see some finishing and that to me is really crucial, as a strategy."

(Head P4)

They were all personally productive and effective and as well as aligning the people to the strategy, they aligned the budget as well. Some headteachers (Heads 4, 8) referred to the "figurehead" role of leadership being visible, available and approachable and 'leading from the front'. Also headteachers seemed to be well respected in the community. A summary of the analysis of the personal qualities and characteristics of their strategic leadership is given in Figure 4.3.

Personal qualities of strategic leaders	Characteristics strategic leaders exhibit
- They are proud, passionate, committed and dedicated. - They are personally effective and energised. - They are focused and determined. - They are honest, open, genuine and humble.	- They have high expectations, want the best for all children and are restless for improvement. - They develop self-belief and 'a can do culture'. - They invest in people and develop leadership capacity. - They demonstrate strategic wisdom and historical understanding. - They are not frightened to have 'difficult conversations' and challenge performance.

Figure 4.3 – Strategic leadership: personal qualities and characteristics

4.3.ii Working strategically with key staff and governors

Schools had various structures with different roles and responsibilities to share leadership. These structures were important for getting people 'on board', translating the strategy into action and achieving and sustaining success. The strongest and most regular leadership collaboration was not surprisingly between headteacher and deputy head. Five Heads (P1, P4, 1, 7 and 10) in particular talked about the complementary nature of the relationship and in appointing the Deputy Head looked for skills, qualities and knowledge that were missing in themselves.

The next most influential structure was the Senior Management Team (SMT) or Leadership Team but there was no clear pattern as to how they functioned. Some teams met in school time, others in the evening; some had formal agendas, others met informally. Head P4 met her SMT out of school to ensure strategic items were discussed. The larger schools tended to have more teams and to meet regularly. Head 1 had a Leadership Team and a Strategy Team, while Head 5 often preferred to discuss strategy initially with the whole staff and get feedback before discussing it in detail with the SMT. In theory, the SMT was a key team for providing strategic leadership, but in practice some headteachers had encountered problems. In the early years of headship, Head P3 had discovered that the SMT was 'a block' to strategy, using information gained to ensure the strategy was not translated into successful action. Because of a huge budget deficit and union pressure over

redundancies, on starting her new job Head 8 was unable to make the key appointment of deputy head and had to create a leadership team with no financial incentives to offer.

> "…… I agreed that we would not appoint a deputy and that I would instead develop a leadership team in the school using existing senior staff. So I suppose strategically that was a big challenge for me working with staff …… so there was myself, the three senior teachers in the school who virtually shared what had been the deputy's role, for no extra money …… so it was all based on goodwill."

(Head 8)

In a similar way, Head 9 had inherited 'a dysfunctional SMT' and so initially worked directly with the whole staff.

Other leadership structures involving the rest of the staff tended to be more informal and varied greatly. Large schools were more likely to have further tiers of leadership (e.g. an inclusion team, a pastoral team) and several headteachers had used the government's staff restructuring into teaching and learning responsibilities (TLR Structure) as an opportunity to create or extend leadership roles. Many schools had successfully developed the leadership dimension of curriculum co-ordinators and worked strategically with them. However Heads 5 and 6 had met resistance from staff, and unions, over subject leadership and responsibility if it was not part of the TLR structure. Head 5 found it easier to work strategically with new and younger staff.

> "Delegating to people in terms of subject leadership is more difficult. Some find it very difficult to accept that they've got a responsibility …… we've an elderly profile in terms of staffing …… the people I delegate to best are my newer staff."

(Head 5)

Head 2 sometimes ensured the School Council participated in strategic thinking, particularly with the creation of extended services.

All headteachers worked closely with governors, which contributed to sustainability (Hill, 2006). However there was a sharp contrast in the levels of strategic thinking between the 'very strong, switched on' governing bodies and those that 'rubber stamped'. Some heads, particularly in socially advantaged areas, had governors who were 'intelligent', 'non-political', 'not afraid to challenge' and very involved in strategic thinking, often providing strategic leadership.

"…… our governors actually do question our staff …… about how they meet the challenge of our most able children …… what provision is made for our brightest children in academic work, in sport and in the arts. That's very much part of the strategy."

(Head 7)

In contrast, some heads had governing bodies who were very supportive, but it was left to the headteacher to provide the strategic thrust to help governors see 'the bigger picture' and prepare for future trends. Head P4 was able to compare the governing bodies of her two headships and summed up the variation.

"(The governors had)…… a quite lengthy discussion on the possibilities because they have their own intelligence even if it's not in education …… I worked in (name of school) for a while, their governors couldn't have coped with discussion …… (in my present school) they're very interested, they want what's right for the children, they're very unafraid as governors to challenge me …… It's so variable, you have to work with what you get …… you can't choose them really."

(Head 7)

Despite these differences, there was much evidence of innovative practice in attempting to engage governors in strategic processes. Head 3 had formed an 'Every Child Matters' committee, deliberately composed of parent governors, while Head P3 had introduced a 'Governor of the Month' who worked closely with the relevant curriculum co-ordinator on current and future plans.

"'Governor of the month' really has worked …… I release the co-ordinator for half a day and the governor comes in. It's good for the co-ordinator …… they know what their successes are, what they have to do. They show the governor round the school, and then when it comes to the Governors' Meeting, the governor reports back. It's positive on both sides. So it is a strategy to get the governors on board."

(Head P3)

Head 9 carried out every half term 'a lesson sweep, OFSTED style, in a morning' with four staff and the Link Governor was part of the feedback process the team made to each other. Head P1 organised an annual meeting between staff and governors where the School Improvement Plan and Strategic Plan were discussed. Head 10 had a Strategic Planning and Review Governors' Committee and Head 7 had a working party on sustainable energy, initiated and driven by

governors. Governing bodies had been closely involved in the appointment of the Deputy Head and this was felt to be an important strategic decision.

In working strategically with others, headteachers were astute at identifying the key players, amongst staff and governors, who could develop and implement the strategy. In the process, headteachers demonstrated strategic wisdom and clear historical understanding. The various teams – Head and Deputy, SMT or Leadership Team or other groups – had impact on translating the strategy into action and sustaining the school's success.

4.3.iii Strategies for success

When asked to explain why their school was successful, no headteacher was initially categoric. They were modest and somewhat hesitant as to the basis of their success. Achieving success was not simple nor straightforward, but rather indirect and difficult to distil. Conscious of the somewhat precarious nature of results, some headteachers felt success was fragile and conditional, and could change from year to year. They worried about 'the high price of success' and were perplexed about unexpected dips in KS2 results or value added scores which could result in downgrading in the next OFSTED inspection. On the other hand, several headteachers pointed out that being successful in OFSTED terms put them in a strong and privileged position to control their destiny.

> "…… we're fortunate in that we're successful, and if you're successful and you can prove it you don't have to take on board what external authorities might try and insist on. You can say 'Look, we're obviously doing what we're doing and it's working for us, our children are making as much progress as they're going to, therefore leave us alone'."

(Head 3)

They all agreed that it had taken time and hard work to achieve success.

High quality staff seemed to be a key to success (McKinsey, 2007). After some reflection, all headteachers mentioned the importance of staff in achieving their success.

> "My key point …… is staff to the hilt with quality staff, and if they're not quality, train them until they become quality."

(Head 5)

Head 1 felt that success was underpinned by "cracking good teachers" and Head 3 believed that one of the most important parts of his job was "to get the best possible teachers."

> "But underlying all of that (success), all the things I've described, from academic to social, to sporting and music, it's all due to having good staff, and that's the reason, I mean really that's the underpinning reason. People who are great in the classroom, who will give their time to other activities as well."

> (Head 4)

Despite falling rolls, Head 5 invested financially in staffing as a strategy for success.

> "…… despite the fact that we'd dropped numbers, my staff has increased massively …… All we've done is take a decision that staffing is paramount."

> (Head 5)

The careful deployment of effective teaching assistants, not just teachers, was part of that strategy which was endorsed by Head 9.

> "…… putting a supportive teaching assistant with somebody who's finding the job a bit challenging has been an enormous benefit, because it's often just an extra pair of hands in the classroom or another person who can talk to a child who's having difficulties that makes a difference."

> (Head 9)

Head 3 highlighted the combination of like minded staff and a clear mission statement as a powerful strategy.

> "If you can get that (the mission statement) right and you get people who think along the same lines that you do, then it's easy, or easier to manoeuvre the school in the direction you want it to go."

> (Head 3)

Head 4 also seized the opportunity of appointing 'like minded people' over a period of time.

> "…… the longer you're in post the more opportunity you've got to appoint people yourself, hopefully, people who see things the same way as you. So you've got people working towards the same goal, vision, targets …… and I think that's vitally important." (Head 4)

For some headteachers, getting 'the right person' at appointment was crucial.

> "But the biggest factor is …… recruiting younger staff who've got this
> enthusiasm that's infectious and training them up."

(Head 9

Head 3 organised to observe candidates for a vacancy teach and was prepared to go to great lengths to recruit the kind of teacher he wanted.

> "What I'm looking for is what we now call a 'flair teacher', someone who just has that
> natural giftedness if you like …… and who's on the same wavelength, has the same
> ethos as the rest of us."

(Head 3)

Head 2 also considered personalities and "the blend of people to make a team." The most strategic appointment, after that of headteacher, was the deputy head.

> "Recruitment of staff I think is the key one. We've got the right players, an extremely
> able Deputy Headteacher who's also the best classroom practitioner that I've seen. But
> committed staff throughout, a very strong KS1 co-ordinator, the Senior Management Team."

(Head 7)

As well as excellent teaching, headteachers looked for headship potential in appointing the deputy head.

> "…… this is my third Deputy Head. Two went on to Headships. I wouldn't appoint
> anyone who I didn't think would stick at Deputy Headship …… we need big development
> leaders for the future …… he's very raw but he's got potential and it's how you manage
> that …… I know he'll make it, but he's certainly not ready yet and needs a lot of support."

(Head P3)

> "Perhaps even more important than that (appointment of staff) is appointing the right
> Deputy. I've been very fortunate with the Deputies that I've appointed. Three of
> them are Heads and another one is being interviewed. So that's a part of the strategy,
> appointing staff."

(Head 4)

A further criterion for selecting the deputy head was complementary partnership with the headteacher. This sometimes emerged during the interview process when there were two strong candidates, and as a strategic decision, somewhat contradicted how, in general appointments, some headteachers looked for 'like minded people'.

> "...... you want someone whose skills are complementary, and that's what we looked for, that's what we've gone with, so there's a genuine partnership of people who've got complementary skills at the top ...... I think it's such a huge potent force."

(Head 7)

Leading a small school, Head 3 pinpointed the strategy of retaining the same teacher, expert in National Tests preparation, regularly in the mixed Year 5/Year 6 class.

> "...... she has a very strict way of doing it and it works well, because she's a flair teacher to the nth degree first off, but she's well organised and structured so that when those kids go in for their SATs they've got absolutely everything they need year in, year out. It's been refined and changed but only slightly because now we've got it near perfection."

(Head 3)

At the same time, he realised it could be a high risk strategy and it would have a 'knock-on effect' should she ever be on long term absence. While seeing the number of applications (274) for a teaching post as a measure of the school's success, Head 1 also recognised that it was "worrying" because "you haven't got time to go through their forms properly" and questioned consequently whether the best candidate was selected. Head P1 felt getting the right people at appointment was important but highlighted recruitment problems in socially disadvantaged areas.

> "Because we're in a challenging area it's sometimes very difficult to attract good quality staff. It annoys me when the government says look for good quality staff but it's not easy if you're in a difficult area because people know if they come to (name of school) they're going to have to work very hard with behaviour. It's not easy."

(Head P1)

Of course only a proportion of a school's staff would have been appointed by each headteacher. For existing staff, inherited on the head's appointment, the strategy was a long term reculturing process through training, professional dialogue, participation and empowerment to help them conceptualise the bigger picture and move the school to greater success. Head 9 had managed the

reculturing process without any staff leaving, other than in normal circumstances such as retirement, promotion and relocation.

> "What I think I managed to do is additionality rather than change (of staff). And the huge difference was being able to offer support to them."

> (Head 9)

Most schools in the research had teachers who were all assessed as 'good' and often 'outstanding' by OFSTED, but in terms of performance headteachers required at least adequacy. Heads were not frightened to have 'difficult conversations' with staff and were prepared to take them through capability procedures but only as a last resort. In describing the process of reculturing the ethos of the school to high expectations, Head 8 made use of Collin's (2001) bus analogy to show how she managed and aligned staff.

> "…… you get the bus and there are people on the bus and they're in the wrong seats, some of them need to get off the (name of school) bus. I gave everybody the chance to move seats, but at the end of the day there were some people who could not stay on the bus and needed to get off as soon as possible for the sake of the children……"

> (Head 8)

It may be seen as stating the obvious but part of 'getting the right people' was getting the right headteacher and what became apparent clearly through the interviewing process was that the headteacher's effective leadership was vital to each school's sustainable success and making a difference to children's lives. Headteachers were drivers of the strategies to provide a broad curriculum, to promote self-belief and a 'can do culture' and foster the relationships, the ethos and the conditions for success to thrive.

Whole school systems, e.g. for monitoring, assessment, target setting and evaluation of learning (Southworth, 2005) which had been agreed with staff and followed, were powerful strategies for success. These whole school systems were closely allied to clear school structures for roles and responsibilities, discussed earlier, and linked to building leadership capacity. Firstly these systems required a whole school approach, with staff all pulling together in the same direction; secondly staff were closely involved in the design of the systems and understood them; thirdly the systems had to work, that is they were prioritised, purposeful and manageable; fourthly the systems provided challenge directly to staff and indirectly to pupils; and finally the systems were embedded and

would still work successfully if the headteacher was absent (Heads P1, P2) or left for promotion (Head P3). The headteachers never lost sight of their vision; the systems had to improve learning and enhance the school's success, or they were abandoned.

> "…… systems which allow people to get on with what's important, and that they're not just doing things for the sake of it."

> (Head 10)

> "What I do is I set in place systems which if followed should ensure success. And, remembering what it's like in the classroom, I try to make it easier to follow the system, than to buck against it. So an awful lot of spadework goes into getting the system right, getting the paperwork right."

> (Head 6)

Head 5 had spent "significant time and energy" on an individualised tracking system which enabled teachers to set personalised targets.

> "…… we look at what they (the children) can do, where they need to go, what we can do …… these are specifically the tactics to use with this child, at this point in time, and so we've got different levels of how we're moving the children on."

> (Head 5)

Head 3 described a marking and feedback system which had improved writing and encouraged the children to learn how to learn.

> "…… analysing children's work, it's about the marking process, it's about the system of marking children's work …… discussing children's work with them …… what they need to be doing and giving them targets."

> (Head 3)

To achieve and sustain success, Head 6 had established quality assurance systems to monitor teaching performance and standards.

> "So going from a situation where a teacher would openly say 'What's it got to do with the Head what happens in my classroom?', we would now be in a situation where that teacher would routinely do a quality assurance check of her own practice against standards, or a colleague. Or a colleague do a check against her standards …… the Leadership (Team) oversee that whole process."

> (Head 6)

Headteachers supported staff and 'provided the resources and finance' for monitoring systems. Lesson observations and talking to children needed classroom release time as they had to be done during the school day. On the other hand, work scrutiny and monitoring teachers' planning could be carried out more flexibly. As part of a consistent, systematic approach, Head 1, in consultation with staff, had designed proformas for monitoring and evaluation – lesson observations, work sampling, weekly and medium plans and focus groups of children. She felt that releasing staff together – the KS1 and KS2 co-ordinators who also had responsibility for Literacy and Maths respectively throughout the school – for half a day per week "had made a marked difference on standards."

As well as formal monitoring systems, informal monitoring could also provide considerable insight. Head 1 pointed to the open plan design of the building because everyone was on view all the time and to a high profile, whole school assembly which focused on learning.

> "On a Friday afternoon I take the whole school …… each teacher has to select four
> or five pieces of work for Show and Tell certificates. There's a system throughout
> the school, when they've got five they get a Bronze Award, when they've got ten they
> get a Silver and so on, and they get those at an assembly with parents there. It's
> highly competitive and a huge occasion. Parents take time off to be at the Achievement
> Assembly …… I use it to find out what the children know and what they've been doing."

(Head 1)

Head 4 used a strategy of putting new staff into a team structure with experienced teachers so that they were "absorbed into the systems". Three Heads (5, 7 and 9) indicated that monitoring of staff was proportionate, "different strokes for different folks" (Head 5), while Head P2 hinted at how she had to be careful that a member of staff does not feel singled out.

> "I don't think the monitoring is that heavy handed but people know it will happen
> and it's kind of that thing here …… the inverse proportion to success. For sure those
> people I know where everything's working fine get a pretty light touch on monitoring."

(Head 7)

In contrast to this OFSTED pattern of monitoring, Head 9's proportionate monitoring was informal and supportive.

"I try to differentiate how I handle them, according to their needs. So, I don't treat them all the same: if somebody's got a tendency to be negative, I go into their classroom more often and say positive things, than somebody who's motoring."

(Head 9)

It is worth expressing a note of caution at this point. While whole school systems were powerful strategies for success, they nevertheless needed to be complemented by good relationships between all members of the school community and a positive, trusting ethos where everyone was valued.

4.4   How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term?

In analysing responses to and discussing findings of other research questions, it has already become clear that the headteachers in the investigation successfully built leadership capacity and invested in people. In defining success in terms of creating a positive ethos, developing good relationships and promoting staff morale and happiness, and believing staff to be the key to success, headteachers nurtured the well-being of staff (Hargreaves, 2005), involving, valuing and praising them and wanting to earn their respect, and recognised their sustained contribution to raising standards. They fostered relationships of trust, giving people confidence and empowering them with a 'voice', and they spotted potential, wanting to get the best out of this expensive and valuable resource.

In all schools, the heads developed 'absorptive capacity' and 'adaptive capacity' (Boal and Hooijberg, 2001) in staff, but it was particularly true of schools in 'serious weaknesses' or with identified problems. Through motivation and inspiring confidence, newly appointed Heads were able to change attitudes and lead staff to higher levels of knowledge and understanding. On appointment Head 8 had encountered a disaffected pupil who was convinced of his perpetual failure.

> "…… he refused to open his Reading Test booklet. I went and sat next to him and
> said 'What's the problem?' and he said 'I'm just wasting my time, what's the point?
> I can't read, so what's the point in opening it?' It didn't matter what I said to him,
> he just could not bring himself to open that booklet, even to look at the pictures ……
> it was painful."

(Head 8)

When explaining her concern about this in the staffroom,

> "one member of staff turned round and said 'Well what do you expect from
> children like this?'"

(Head 8)

She realised this attitude was "an immense problem" and used training and building leadership capacity as "the key to achievement", changing the mindset to self-belief and high expectations.

Within a week of becoming Acting Headteacher, OFSTED put Head 5's school into the category of 'serious weaknesses'. New leadership at the top and a very critical, although not unexpected, OFSTED report were motivational triggers.

> "…… to start with we were beaten with so many sticks there was only one way to go …… we just became so focused and determined to prove everybody wrong."

(Head 5)

After "some sticking plaster stuff straightaway", Head 5 invested long term in staff as people and in their professional development, providing "a massive budget". He instilled in them a sense of self-belief and overcame a fear of how external bodies would judge them.

> "…… the strategy I adopted was 'Blame me. Whatever anybody says when they come to this school, you blame me. If you're doing exactly what I want you to do, what we discussed or what's in the School Development Plan, there is no-one else to blame but me'. And it took a long time to get that culture (of self-belief), but eventually we got it."

(Head 5)

On appointment, Head 9 immediately invested in people and established trust through honest and open communication.

> "I interviewed all the staff on my appointment before I came and asked them three questions: firstly about themselves, secondly about their ambitions for the future for themselves, and if they were sitting in my chair what they would do to improve the school …… because of the mistrust of the previous regime, it got everybody more on board with me and actually relating to me from the start. The other thing I did was at interview they asked me what I would actually do if I was appointed and I gave the staff a copy of that as a mandate."

(Head 9)

Over the next four years, she distributed leadership and developed staff.

> "I think the success of the school has been that we've made our average teachers good and our good teachers outstanding …… So the whole bar's gone up for everybody, and because I've empowered the staff to feel good about themselves, they then pass that on to the children …… I mean the staff are the crucial factor."

(Head 9)

All headteachers were able to describe a range of on-site learning opportunities which demonstrated how they built leadership capacity at all levels and invested in developing future leaders for sustainability. They set a positive role model for children, staff and the community they served; in creating a calm ethos, which supported good behaviour and optimum learning conditions, Head 9 felt she was modelling her calm leadership style for everyone to copy. In the context of performance management, Head 1 was the team leader for the leadership group and saw modelling as the third strand of building capacity, linked to the other two of training and discussion.

> "I think the best way of doing it is for me to model the way that they need to with other people."

> (Head 1)

As well as style, Head 9 wanted others to imitate her qualities as a leader and be infected by her positive and passionate attitude.

> "As a leader you've got to show the qualities you want them to exhibit; you've got to exhibit in abundance yourself and so you're modelling ......
> to inspire people who want to share in your vision ...... this is a good thing to be with this person, because this person knows what they're doing, is confident, and if we go with them then life's going to be good, the school's going to improve."

> (Head 9)

Coaching was seen as another flexible way of building leadership capacity, with several heads mentioning the positive impact of 'Leading from the Middle' courses on both coached and coach.

> "When my staff did 'Leading from the Middle', with having no deputy, I had to be the coach and did the coach training ...... Coaching's about listening, it is about talking and helping people reach their own conclusions."
> (Head 8)

Some staff were trained mentors for NQTs or trainee teachers, which made them reflect and analyse their practice and performance.

> "...... that helps as well to develop capacity of teachers. I'm a great believer in, you've really got to articulate your practice, you've really got to think about it."

> (Head 10)

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Two heads (P4, 9) felt coaching had become part of their culture and had identified several potential deputies and heads of the future.

> "...... all the time people are coaching each other for various things ...... very very supportive teaching, we all get coached by other people on bits that we're not good on."

(Head P4)

Talk and conversations, what Head 5 referred to as "informally thousands of interactions", contributed to building leadership capacity where headteachers could "get things in" (Head 1) or "sow seeds" (Head 10). Around school, staff, including teaching assistants, were observed by headteachers to have many conversations about teaching, learning and leadership.

> "...... many conversations are going on about learning, about the craft of teaching
> and the business of your school ...... so in break time, lunch times, I try to be around
> the staff because it's those times they can grab you, to sound you out about something,
> or you can take the opportunity to introduce something into the conversation, plant a
> little seed."

(Head 10)

In particular 1-1 strategic conversations (Davies, B., 2003), both formally and informally, and often with the deputy head, were effective in both sharing and developing leadership (Head 7). Time consuming yet worthwhile, "the talking times", highlighted by Head 1, involved a 1-1 appraisal, in addition to performance management, with each member of staff, where they had a guaranteed hour of individual attention on an annual basis. Team structures, e.g. year groups, inclusion team, with comfortable relationships, were further opportunities for focused smart talk, as were personalised targets and leadership targets in performance management.

In addition, specific on-site learning opportunities which developed leadership capacity were: making a programme on inclusion for Teachers' TV (Head 1), leading a major school development (Head 4) and attending key meetings on budget setting (Head 7). Of course monitoring and evaluation systems were common place in developing total leadership but two headteachers mentioned specific processes that had been significant in building capacity. Head 7 organised for the new SMT to do joint observations with local authority advisers in a mini inspection of the school while Head 9 had successfully introduced an OFSTED style lesson sweep with middle leaders.

> "When the TLRs came into place, to give them more kudos and a better overview of the whole school …… we said we would chunk the school into six half terms and we'd do a lesson sweep OFSTED style in a morning …… (After discussion) the TLR then wrote up some generic points about what they'd seen and areas for development across the whole school, and fed that back immediately at the staff meeting the next week. That is the sharpest piece of observation we've done …… it's been a huge success."

(Head 9)

A whole school approach and a personal commitment to their ICT strategy was considered by Heads 5 and 10 to have developed capacity "massively".

In comparison to on-site learning opportunities, off-site opportunities for building leadership capacity seemed fewer and somewhat predictable – courses and training days, some residential and some with a cluster of schools. Of significance were the long, high profile courses of NPQH and LftM overseen by the NCSL. Head P1 questioned the quality of off-site courses, while Head 3 had found conferences by 'world leaders' in education very beneficial and Head 10 organised visits to other schools for staff and encouraged them to join local authority initiatives and working groups.

Leadership continuity and succession were mentioned by several headteachers. Head 7 pointed out that the school had leadership depth which had been a criterion to enable him to carry out his work as a National Leader of Education (NLE). Head 4 had been asked by the local authority to lead other schools in difficulty for a term and he had confidence in his leadership team.

> "…… when I'm not here, it has to run smoothly. It would be pointless trying to support other colleagues if things were going to pieces in your own school."

(Head 4)

This confidence in total leadership in their schools was reiterated by Heads P1 and 2 in case of absence and by Head P3 on promotion. Head 9 was preparing for the succession of the deputy; while Heads 2 and 4 were preparing governors and staff for succession on their retirement at the normal expected age.

Several headteachers got a "buzz" from bringing teachers on to be leaders and were proud of their successes.

"…… you give them the opportunities, all the chances, but some haven't got the confidence …… this teacher has the potential but not the confidence …… she's started to work with people, she's mixed more, gone on more courses …… she came to me and said she'd really enjoyed this year and now wants to go on to deputy headship. It gives you such a buzz."

(Head P3)

The motivation of the headteacher for building leadership capacity is enhanced by its success.

"It's lovely seeing new members of staff really blossom when they've taken something on board, especially when you've given them a lot of success in front of their peers."

(Head P1)

"We've certainly got one member of staff who's come on a ton in leadership …… from being able to manage things very well, to seeing how she stands up in a staff meeting and leads that staff meeting."

(Head P4)

Head 5 was delighted with the leadership progress of a young teacher in her third year who was leading MFL and ICT throughout the school and had earned the respect of experienced colleagues. Some heads also advocated building the leadership capacity of support staff who show potential.

"One support assistant only does Literacy throughout the school. She didn't originally but because I saw how good she was, seeing her success in booster classes, she got the wobbly 3/4s up there, she's got a lot more say in planning Literacy. She comes to evaluation sessions when we look at targets. She has real accountability for those children and you can see how passionate she is about it. She's the first one there when the envelopes (test results) come. It's good to see it."   (Head P1)

In contrast to this a few headteachers were disappointed that some staff were resistant to a leadership dimension to their job. One difficulty had been caused by the introduction of the government's teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs) and teacher unions insisting on no 'unpaid responsibilities'. Some schools had gone back to calling 'subject leaders' 'curriculum co-ordinators' to circumvent this. Head 10, in a wider system leadership role, was concerned how future TLRs could be prepared for a leadership role.

"I'm going to a meeting …… one of the questions I've tabled is 'Where are
the TLRs of the future going to come from?' Are those people on main scale
doing nothing other than what's in the classroom going to wake up one day
and suddenly become a TLR? Where's the …… what I call 'doing the porridge'?"

(Head 10)

Another difficulty was that of motivation. Head 6 had used a variety of strategies to develop leadership capacity and "seen significant movement" but felt overall success was limited.

"I don't think we've gone much beyond managing, as opposed to leadership. I
don't see natural leadership. …… I keep talking about the rhetoric reality gap,
when you have honest discussions with people the vast majority I know have
no aspirations for more responsibilities and greater workload."

(Head 6)

As previously discussed, a further issue emerged about building leadership capacity and investing in people long term. Although all schools were helping to grow tomorrow's potential leaders, there was a reluctance amongst staff in many schools to apply for leadership promotion in another school. This was compounded by some successful heads seeing this reluctance of staff to move on as a compliment to themselves and their school and were personally flattered. This provided stability, and promoted sustainability for the school, but not for the system.

Part of investing in people long term and building leadership capacity also applies quite obviously to the headteacher as well. The heads clearly felt the turbulence and relentlessness of the pressures of the job but had various personal and professional sustainability strategies to renew themselves (Hill, 2006), although workload and well-being remained issues. One headteacher worried about sustaining "this level of enthusiasm" and another confided in being periodically "worn out" and "exceptionally tired." One head was able to keep home life and school life largely separate while another head possessed "a huge capacity for switching off." Two heads were sustained because the job was rarely boring. Two heads were close to retirement at the normal time and one head planned to take early retirement in five years time. All but two of the headteachers contributed greatly to system leadership. This helped to sustain them professionally, as well as, in some cases, providing additional finance for the school. Several heads were involved in NPQH tutoring and Primary Strategy Consultant Leader (PSCL) work. In the past some had been Workforce Remodelling Consultants, External Advisers for Performance Management and supported or led other schools at

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the request of the local authority. One head was a NLE and four heads had undergone School Improvement Partner (SIP) training. Two heads read widely and many heads belonged to a variety of headteacher networks which kept them up to date and sustained them professionally. One head suggested a term's sabbatical every few years for headteachers to reflect and renew.

4.5 What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?

This research question attempted to discover if headteachers used strategic abandonment in setting leadership priorities for sustainable success. The capacity of strategic abandonment is often associated with strategic timing and means "giving up some activities to accommodate the new ones" (Davies, B., 2004),. The interview question, specifically related to this research question, was phrased

> "In responding to new initiatives or change, have you had to give something up?
> Any examples?"

although the term 'strategic abandonment' was mentioned sometimes in the preface to the question. Towards the end of the sample, with Heads 8, 9 and 10, cards giving the four kinds of 'strategic abandonment' as defined by the thesis were shared with the interviewees to supplement the question in the interview guide. Usually it would be expected to discuss 'strategic abandonment' at the same time as 'strategic leadership', but abandonment as a capacity is given prominence here as the thesis considers its use has potential in conquering workload, being in control of external demands and exercising "informed professional judgement" (Barber, 2002).

To the direct question, headteachers responded cautiously and some heads gave the impression that the idea of giving something up that was going well was morally wrong. Most heads disliked the term 'abandonment'; it seemed to be emotive and too clear cut and final. In this context, headteachers' use of language was interesting.

> "We tend to build on things rather than abandon them. Modify and build on."

> (Head P1).

On the other hand, Head 1 was comfortable using terms such as "ditch" and "dump" and Head 10 similarly with "get rid of". Most heads preferred to 'adapt' or 'modify', while Head 5 "deferred" and Head 7 "shelved". In discussing the 'abandonment' cards, 'neglect' (part of 'intelligent neglect'), usually in schools associated with 'child neglect', received a somewhat negative reaction.

In analysing the use headteachers made of strategic abandonment, evidence is drawn directly from the specific question about that concept but also evidence is taken from responses to other questions

where it is clear heads are using strategic abandonment and making conscious decisions about it. Head P3 had first of all refined the Family Group session, which had been successful for several years, and then abandoned it because Maths and additional RE were priorities. The structured scheme of thinking skills had been abandoned by Head 3, but this was more of a natural withering rather than a systematic approach. Head 10 had abandoned outdated practices and shrunk paperwork in order to reduce workload and create time. The guiding principle in being selective was the benefit to the children and school; Head 1 was very clear about what had to go and what needed to be retained because it was integral to the vision.

> "…… we've never given up the project based approach …… but there was no way the Integrated Day would work with the Literacy Strategy so we had to change quickly …… So we try to make everything new that's come on board fit what we do. So we haven't ditched the projects, we haven't ditched the Art and the Drama."
>
> (Head 1)

It emerged that abandonment of activities had to be managed and justified carefully. In one school the introduction of the government's social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) had superseded the personal, health and social education (PHSE) curriculum devised by the school co-ordinator and successfully implemented.

> "(The co-ordinator) did a huge amount of work on PHSE and then they brought SEAL along, and she was quite upset …… I can understand she's slightly aggrieved that she'd put all that work in, all this time, effort and energy …… and then the Powers that be come along and say right, you're doing 'that'."
>
> (Head 3)

Parents needed to be fully informed of the reasons for abandoning the summer musical (Head 1) and part of Sports Day (Head P2).

Several headteachers cited the Literacy and Numeracy strategies and how they had adapted or abandoned parts of it. Much of this was about realising the limitations of the prescription and rigidity of the strategies and instead using professional judgement in assessing and personalising learning.

"Nobody follows a programme from beginning to end, they do the bits that they need to do, as shown by assessment …… it's aimed at the area they need to improve in. And the results are astonishing."

(Head 6)

Headteachers needed confidence to abandon or retain activities, in the light of pressure, and to prioritise them.

"…… there's limits to what you can be involved with …… professionally, as an individual or as a school, and you look at what the clear priorities are."

(Head 7)

It also needed "a certain bravery" (Head 5), "strength" (Head 4) or "bottle" (Head 9) to say "no" to initiatives (Collins, 2001).

Of the four kinds of abandonment defined in the thesis, 'rejection' was the one that resonated most strongly with headteachers. Several heads had rejected suggestions from the local authority to get involved in certain initiatives (Head 10), for example a pupil tracking system (Head 9) and ICT software (Head 5). Head 9 had rejected involvement in the Intensive Support Programme (ISP), feeling from working with schools who had done ISP that "it dragged the staff down further than it raised them up."

"They (the local authority) wanted to put us into the Intensive Support Programme because our results, though better than they were, were still under …… the magic 65. And I said 'That's absolutely ridiculous. You're using me as a Primary Consultant leader, and you know that our strategies are right, we just haven't reaped the rewards yet.' So I stood my ground and said 'Do I have to have it?' 'No.' 'I'm not having it then.' I think in terms of leadership I'm very strong on that. If something comes in that I think will benefit the school, I'll do it."

(Head 9)

Head 5 had declined to continue the I.S.P. with the local authority; however he had continued with his own version of ISP, retaining the best features, abandoning certain parts and relinquishing funding from the local authority but also accountability to them.

A modern foreign language (MFL) and full extended services were common examples given in response to the specific interview question; this was not outright rejection, but more a case of

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"intelligent neglect" (Lovely, 2006), putting them 'on hold' or to be implemented 'in their own time' or 'when the time is appropriate'.

> "To be honest the priority a couple of years ago was not Modern Foreign Languages.
> It's going to have to be a priority soon and for sure it will become one, so that's one
> we've certainly shelved."

(Head 7)

Head P2 was very decisive about rejection, for example of the extended schools agenda, if she felt the school's core purpose was under threat.

> "I thought it was getting too much …… I didn't want to be involved in the
> neighbourhood nurseries and out of school hours clubs. If I have to deliver these
> things, I'll do it in my own time and in my own way. I know some schools do it
> but I can only take on one thing at a time …… you have to be careful as a head;
> some heads can be dragged into these initiatives which aren't central to our core
> service. Our core service is delivering high quality education and I feel you've
> got to keep your finger on the button …… At the end of the day, if the quality
> of education is affected, at this school we would get our knuckles rapped."

(Head P2)

It was easier to say 'no' with experience and some heads, in the course of their NPQH work, expressed concern for inexperienced heads.

> "…… you have to not feel guilty. But I think the longer you get into your headship,
> the less you're worried about guilt, really."

(Head 10)

Several heads pointed out that being successful in OFSTED terms put them in a strong and privileged position to control their destiny; it seemed that they could be assertive, confident in the knowledge they had the 'outstanding' label. At the same time they had empathy for schools not achieving satisfactory results and thought that heads of unsuccessful schools must find it hard to say 'no'.

> "I do feel for those schools who are not achieving the results we are, because it
> must be very difficult to escape this straitjacket that they must feel under."

(Head 2)

One head believed that schools should use their autonomy to make their own decisions.

> "You can chase your tail as a head. I think we have more autonomy than we
> think we have. That's my belief. And people infer that it's compulsory ……
> I ring up and ask
> > 'Do I have to do it?'
> > 'Well no, not really.'
> > 'Well, I'm not doing it then.'"

(Head 9)

'Opting out' or 'irresponsible abandonment' is where the headteacher or other leaders in the school know they will be retiring in a few years and so do not invest in the planning and preparation nor gain the personal commitment of staff to make the initiative a success. This kind of abandonment was only mentioned by Head P2 in response to the specific 'open' question about 'strategic abandonment' in the interview guide. However, using the 'abandonment' cards towards the end of the sample, 'opting out' resonated with all three heads, with Heads 9 and 10 believing that was what happened at their schools before their appointment and Head 8 recognising evidence of this on starting her new school. During the course of the interview, two heads described situations in other schools, from their system leadership work, which suggested 'irresponsible abandonment'. Head 3 believed that unsuccessful schools did not necessarily make bad decisions, but simply did not make decisions, while Head 7 referred to some heads having "a certain state of paralysis", aware of a problem but doing nothing about it. In the case of two heads nearing retirement, selflessness (Lovely, 2006, Collins, 2001) was evident not 'opting out'. Head 2 was preparing the Deputy Head, particularly on budget and data, and the governors on extended services.

> "I have discussed recently with governors the fact that long term this is the plan
> for the school …… it would be so easy to say 'Nothing to do with me' but you've
> got to plan for it, so that what you're trying to do is build up in the minds of the
> governors that this is a picture of the school in 2010."

(Head 2)

Head 4 had not appointed a deputy headteacher and put in place a temporary structure so that the new head would have the opportunity to appoint a deputy who would share his/her their vision.

'Enforced abandonment' is where successful programmes have to be abandoned because of factors such as staffing changes, falling rolls, finance or external constraints. Head 8 was adamant she would always find the finance from other sources if the activity was beneficial, although she admitted the London Art Gallery visit was 'on hold' for some time.

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"I suppose the London (Art Gallery Project) is this (enforced abandonment). I've had the idea, but I wouldn't say abandonment, because it's always there, you always intend to do it …… you never abandon the idea."

(Head 8)

Head 6 felt that formal performance management, constrained by union pressure, had forced him to abandon a very successful system.

"When Performance Management came along it absolutely killed stone dead what we did have in place which I regarded as very successful. We had a Professional Development Dialogue where …… each member of staff would be quite open and honest about where they saw themselves going and what they wanted to do …… the unions fought over every word, every percentage, it became very formal …… We tried to run both: this will satisfy the requirements, and this is what we believe works …… But it got very confused so one died, the other chugged along."

(Head 6)

Falling rolls had caused Head 4 to have 'mixed age' classes, to change the structure of planning teams and to squeeze finance for monitoring and evaluation time.

At different points during the interview, most headteachers referred to filtering systems (Lovely, 2006) to cope with the volume of information bombarding schools. Headteachers, deputy heads and leadership or senior management teams were the key people in filtering information.

"I actually feel a lot of the time that I am the buffer zone between the daft ideas and the teacher in the classroom …… I'll say 'We're not going to do that, just carry on what you're doing, ignore it."

(Head P4)

The purpose of filtering systems seemed to be two fold; firstly information was rejected or selected to 'take pressure off staff' and so 'they don't panic'; and secondly key information, important to the success of the school, was filtered through to staff and had a greater chance of 'sticking' (Hadfield, 2005). In setting leadership priorities, it is clear that headteachers in the investigation used aspects of strategic abandonment to sustain the success of the school. However their use of strategic abandonment was not systematic and not an integral part of self-evaluation systems.

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4.6   Summary of main findings

Primary schools in the study were successful over time in both official measures and broader, more strategic measures. They demonstrated that success was necessary in the short term for survival and in the long term for sustainability. Headteachers in the investigation felt success was hard to achieve and not easy to explain. They felt official success was fragile, and they raised issues and worries about results and their interpretation and implications. Several headteachers realised that the 'outstanding' label from OFSTED put them in a strong and privileged position to control their destiny. Many headteachers reported that happy, successful staff with good leadership capacity were reluctant to leave for promotion in another school.

Headteachers found the term 'strategy' difficult to grasp and define. However most headteachers viewed strategy as direction setting and a holistic process, clearly linked to the vision and dealing with the short and long term. Written strategic plans varied considerably in timescales, flexibility and detail. Several key stakeholders in the school were involved in strategic thinking to ensure the school's success. Strategy was used as a perspective to view the future but also as a template to direct, monitor and evaluate current actions. Headteachers were both proactive, linking short term actions to the long term strategy, and reactive, employing intervention strategies to tackle identified problems. Many headteachers translated strategy into action through a reculturing process.

Headteachers in the research were clearly focused on pupils' learning and were proud, passionate and determined. They used strategic leadership to exert considerable influence over people in the organisation, investing in them and building leadership capacity. Headteachers displayed historical understanding of their schools and strategic wisdom about the people they worked with and the context in which they operated. They challenged low expectations and were not frightened to tackle within school variation. They were astute at identifying key players for translating strategy into action and worked strategically with individuals, several teams and governors. High quality staff was a key to success. Some headteachers saw the appointment of the deputy head as a key strategic decision and acknowledged the positive impact of teaching assistants on success. Clear school structures for roles and responsibilities and whole school systems, which had been agreed and followed, were powerful strategies for success. However they needed to be complemented by good relationships between all members of the school community and a positive, trusting ethos where everyone was valued.

Headteachers nurtured staff well-being through a positive ethos, good relationships and recognising their contribution to sustained success. They kept staff morale up and supported them to achieve job satisfaction. A variety of on-site learning opportunities such as modelling, coaching and conversations were used to build leadership capacity. Some headteachers got a 'buzz' from developing teachers into leaders but were flattered by the reluctance of some successful staff to apply for leadership promotion in another school. Most headteachers had personal and professional strategies for renewing themselves.

Several headteachers disliked the terms 'abandonment' and 'neglect' and frowned upon the idea of giving up something successful. Many headteachers operated 'filtering systems' to protect staff from information overload and there was some evidence of relinquishing, rejection and reduction to focus on leadership priorities. These experienced headteachers were brave enough to say 'no' to initiatives. However, in general, the use of 'strategic abandonment' was not systematic and not an integral part of school self-evaluation. In these successful schools, there was no longer any evidence of 'irresponsible abandonment' but, where relevant, succession planning was considered important.

The main findings are discussed in more detail in the conclusion where their significance is evaluated and their implications are examined.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Conclusion

The chapter is in five parts. Firstly, the principal features of the investigation are outlined to put the conclusion into context. Secondly, the strengths and weaknesses of the investigation are evaluated. Thirdly, the main findings are summarised around each of the five research questions and their importance highlighted. Fourthly, the implications of the research for professionals, government policy makers and the research field of leadership, strategy and school improvement are discussed. Finally, a revised model of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools is presented. The aim of the structure is to provide clarity, but in doing so it is acknowledged that there is repetition in several parts.

5.1   Principal features of the investigation

The investigation was fundamentally about leadership. This was the total leadership (Leithwood et al, 2006) in a primary school, that is the vital contribution of the headteacher and leadership within the school at all levels. The thesis investigated how primary schools can be created whose success can be sustained long term. From the literature review, possible characteristics of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools were outlined.

Primary schools at present have to survive in a high stakes accountability climate. Short term actions to raise standards and improve performance are both necessary and valuable but by themselves are inadequate. They need to be supported by a more strategic, sustainable approach. To ensure sustainability of success, primary schools need a dual commitment to the short term and the long term (Davies, 2007).

Primary schools have to operate in a turbulent environment, involving change which can be complex, messy, fast-paced and relentless (Fullan, 2004). Crucial to a school's sustainable success is the quality of the strategic leadership of the headteacher, what strategic capacities he or she models and how these are developed in leaders at all levels. Success was discussed and questioned in terms of 'official' measures of success and alternative, strategic measures. The research examined how leadership impacts on all these measures of success and how successful schools are making their success last.

The primary school headteacher was identified as the 'key player' as all five research questions revolve around his or her leadership.

1. How do primary headteachers define their success?
2. What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'?
3. How do primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable?
4. How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term?
5. What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?

To answer these questions, rich and illuminative data needed to be collected, to gain deep insight into the complexity of headteachers' situations and to develop a holistic understanding of their points of view.

The research approach was qualitative as this provides 'the most appropriate fit' for holistic understanding, seeking depth and detail and generating new theories inductively (Fogelman, 2002). The research design was a case study, focusing on a single case, a school, and grounded in its natural context where the action is (Bassey, 2002). The semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate research method for collecting the qualitative data from primary headteachers in that it is a fruitful source of information and a particularly useful and powerful tool, widely used in educational contexts (Wragg, 2002). Headteachers were interviewed for an average of an hour, to find out why they say what they say in their own terms using an interview guide which offered both structure and flexibility. A sample of fourteen serving headteachers of successful primary schools, including three from junior schools, were chosen through recommendations from network groups, individual headteachers and local authority advisers after sifting through publicly available data about Key Stage 2 results, value added measures and OFSTED inspection reports. Geographically, the schools were in six local authorities in the north-east of England. Rich and illuminative data was gathered, analysed and then interpreted. The research was relevant to the researcher as an experienced headteacher of a large primary school, to other school leaders and the system, to the research field and to government policy makers.

5.2   The strengths and weaknesses of the investigation

Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts in which they live (Myers, 2005) and to communicate to the reader that understanding in the same terms as the actors (Firestone, 1987). The primary headteachers in the research seemed to treat the interview as 'a special occasion' (Gillham, 2004) and to be open and honest in their answers; they wanted 'to tell their story' and share their 'secrets of success' as they perceived them. The researcher being an experienced, serving primary headteacher with considerable insight into the job appeared to be a strength of the investigation and interviewees' responses yielded very rich, illuminative material. Rapport with and acceptance by the 'key players' was perhaps the easiest aspect of the study. The high quality of the data produced appears to justify the decision to use a qualitative research approach, rather than a quantitative research approach using a questionnaire.

The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to probe 'below the surface' with supplementary questions. All interviews were fully transcribed and sent to the interviewees for comment; only one primary headteacher asked for changes to be made. Throughout the research cycle, a series of steps was taken to try to grapple with the issues of validity and reliability and to minimise errors and biases. More specifically, the use of pilot interviews, modified interview guides, transcripts, peer reviews and some triangulation strengthened the qualitative equivalents of reliability and validity in the thesis. The investigation has made an original and important contribution to the field of strategy and sustainability and extended the school based evidence, where little research exists at that level. 'Getting out into the field' among the actors to discover meaning, the investigation has managed to capture unique features and unanticipated issues, as well as expected findings. A further strength of the research is that, by fusing theory and practice, it should be more easily accessible to a professional audience.

Of course the research is small scale and as such findings must be treated with caution. A major weakness of the research is that the qualitative approach is inherently subjective at all stages from the selection of the sample to the multiple perceptions of various interviewees to the researcher as interviewer and analyst. The sample was small and several different people were involved in the selection process, although the researcher discarded some suggestions and triangulated recommendations with statistical and documentary information available to the public. The research relies heavily on evidence provided through the perceptions of headteachers only, and

indeed Head 3 commented that "you only have my word for it." Interviewing other leaders in the school was not possible because of time constraints. Similarly two researchers working in pairs to interview and to analyse would have strengthened reliability but this was beyond the resources available. Other limitations have to be acknowledged; the analysis of the interview transcripts is inevitably never perfect (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and it has to be remembered that the finished work is a construction, ie. the researcher's construction (Charmaz, 2006).

If the researcher was starting the investigation again from the beginning, then, with hindsight, it would be tempting to interview other leaders – the deputy head, a member of the leadership team or a middle leader – as well as the headteacher of successful primary schools. This would give another viewpoint on the same school, providing evidence which corroborates or contradicts the perception of the headteacher. Of course, given the constraints of time and resources, that would mean that the sample would be reduced to half the size. Instead, other leaders in the schools could have been asked to complete a questionnaire which would have provided some limited data on other viewpoints of the same school. For most of the interviews, investigation into the use of 'strategic abandonment' was largely centred on an open ended question, followed by supplementary prompts and probes. The phrasing and probing into the use of 'strategic abandonment' was probably the most difficult aspect of the interview process. In the final three interviews, this same open ended question was supplemented by the use of cards giving the definition of the four kinds of abandonment identified in the thesis, and headteachers were asked if they resonated with them. On reflection, the researcher feels that if the cards had been used from the beginning, it would have led to greater understanding of the concept of 'strategic abandonment' and yielded richer data. Documentary evidence of strategic plans and vision, where supplied, proved useful but not all schools were able to provide this. For example some schools did not believe in the value of mission statements. In future, the researcher would follow a more systematic approach to documentary data to support triangulation and strengthen validity. Data analysis and coding became easier with experience of constantly moving backwards and forwards between data collection and analysis, revision and further conceptualisation. If the research was repeated, the same system would be employed but clearly with an extensive list of codes as a starting point.

5.3   How do primary headteachers define their success?

Primary schools were successful over time in official measures of results and inspection reports. This actually was a selection criterion for the sample although it was revealed that most had made

significant progress from a much lower base. They were concerned for the well-being of children and were also successful in strategic measures such as ethos, inclusivity, relationships, parental support and good behaviour. It was not surprising that issues were raised about the value added measure from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, the quality of marking in English tests and cohort variability. What perhaps was more surprising was the subtle understanding of changes in the pupil population, how that could impact on results and the strategy to protect the school's success.

The research provided an insightful perspective of success at primary school level. Success was not easy to explain and hard to achieve; it was fragile and could change from year to year, with headteachers worrying about unexpected dips in KS2 results and downgrading in the next OFSTED report. In contrast to this, and unexpectedly, several headteachers made the point that being successful in OFSTED terms put them in a strong and privileged position to control their destiny. Although staff were happy, were developing their leadership skills and were contributing to the success of the school, an important finding was that they were reluctant to leave for promotion in another school. This new finding has significant implications for recruitment to leadership posts in the system. It was confirmed that success was necessary in the short term for survival and in the long term for sustainability.

5.4 What do primary headteachers understand by the term 'strategy'?

The research supported the view made in the literature review that the term 'strategy' was difficult to grasp and to define and was often associated with specific national strategies. In addition it found that headteachers were not at ease talking about abstract concepts like 'strategy', but were more comfortable discussing concrete examples. Most heads viewed strategy as direction setting and a holistic process, clearly linked to the vision and dealing with the short and long term. All headteachers had a vision, but disagreement occurred as to how and if it should be written down.

The investigation showed that headteachers did not treat 'strategy' and 'strategic planning' synonymously, as strategic thinking was happening in addition to or in spite of a written strategic plan. However there was confusion over the timescales of written strategic plans and how flexible and detailed they should be, and this finding has significant implications for the content of leadership training materials and courses. Some headteachers were under the mistaken impression that written strategic plans had to be detailed, rather than in broad, directional outline. As a consequence they were frustrated and resorted to detailed action planning for one or two years. In

line with the literature, headteachers used strategy as a perspective to view the future but also as a template to direct, monitor and evaluate current actions (Davies B., 2004). They were proactive, linking short term actions clearly to the long term strategy. In addition and importantly, in the short term they sometimes used reactive and intervention strategies where problems were identified in their monitoring and evaluation systems e.g. a dip in results or underperformance of a teacher. Several heads saw translating strategy into action as a reculturing process, knowing 'where they were going', 'how to get there' and what perhaps emerged more strongly as a key finding, the historical understanding of 'where they had come from'.

5.5   How do primary headteachers use strategic leadership to make their schools successful and sustainable?

The research corroborated much of what was stated about leadership in the literature review. As well as giving direction, headteachers exerted considerable influence, directly and indirectly over others in the organisation and were focused on pupils' learning. There was some evidence of all the leadership models described in the literature review. Effective leadership did appear to be central to a school's sustainable success.

In terms of the personal qualities and characteristics of strategic leaders, there were many similarities with the literature. The personal qualities of pride, passion and determination seemed particularly evident. Strategic leaders invested in people and developed leadership capacity in their schools, but at the same time challenged low expectations and were not frightened to tackle within school variation.

One of the selection criteria for inclusion in the sample was "in post for at least four years" and nearly all headteachers were experienced in terms of years or number of headships. They all displayed strategic wisdom about the people they worked with and the context in which they operated. In this research strategic wisdom was strongly linked to historical understanding. Another interesting finding was how some heads operated proportionate monitoring of teachers. Headteachers were astute at identifying key players for translating the strategy into action and worked strategically with individuals and several teams, although structures varied enormously. With governing bodies, some headteachers had to provide the strategic leadership, while in others it was shared between the headteacher and key governors.

Analyses of what headteachers believed to be their strategies for success seemed to fit largely into two categories; staffing and systems. High quality staff was seen as a key to success. It involved getting the 'right people', particularly teachers who were 'like minded' or had 'flair', at appointment. In particular, the appointment of the deputy head was a key strategic decision, as well as the appointment of the headteacher. It also involved getting the 'right people' on board to make the strategy work and getting some staff 'off the bus.' Developing and training staff and providing good quality resources were important factors in achieving the strategy. Several heads talked very positively about the impact of teaching assistants on success. Whole school systems, e.g. monitoring, target setting, assessment and evaluation, which had been agreed and followed by staff, were powerful strategies for success. However they needed to be complemented by good relationships between all members of the school community and a positive, trusting ethos where everyone was valued.

5.6   How do they build leadership capacity and invest in people long term?

It was significant that headteachers invested in people long term, nurturing their well-being through a positive ethos and good relationships, and recognised their contribution to sustained success. Staff morale and job satisfaction seemed high. Headteachers developed absorptive capacity and adaptive capacity in leaders at all levels for sustainability. They used a variety of on-site learning opportunities such as modelling, coaching and conversations to build leadership capacity. In several schools, unlike the view expressed in the literature review, staff had been trained in coaching. Heads were very positive about the impact of leadership programmes such as NPQH and Leading from the Middle.

Several headteachers got a 'buzz' from bringing teachers on to be leaders, although a few heads were disappointed that some staff were resistant to a leadership dimension to their job. Although all schools were helping to grow future potential leaders, there was a reluctance amongst staff in many schools to apply for leadership promotion in another school. This was compounded by some successful heads seeing this reluctance of staff to move on as a compliment to themselves and their school and were personally flattered. This unanticipated finding has serious implications for government policy makers. Headteachers had various strategies for renewing themselves personally and professionally which gave some insight into sustainability. Of significance perhaps was the variety of ways headteachers took on a wider role outside their school and contributed to system leadership.

5.7   What use do they make of the concept of 'strategic abandonment'?

Several headteachers frowned upon the idea of giving up something successful. Those heads who were made aware of the terminology from the literature perceived it as a negative concept, disliking the words 'abandonment' and 'neglect'. Of the four kinds of abandonment defined in the thesis, 'rejection' was the one that resonated most strongly with headteachers. In focusing on priorities, they acted strategically to ensure and protect their success by rejecting initiatives which did not contribute to their achievement but which instead increased workload.   These experienced headteachers were brave enough to do it, but they were concerned for inexperienced heads or heads of schools in difficulty who may not have the strength of character to say 'no'.

As there was no question, direct or supplementary, on this aspect, it was surprising how many heads mentioned that they operated "filtering systems" (Lovely, 2006) to protect staff from information overload. Several headteachers clearly recognised the concept of "irresponsible abandonment" but there was no evidence of this now in these successful schools.   In contrast, where relevant, succession planning was high on the agenda. While there was clear evidence that some heads made use of 'strategic abandonment', it was not systematic and not an integral part of school self-evaluation. This finding is worthy of serious consideration by training providers and researchers in the field of strategy and school improvement.

5.8   Implications for professionals, government policy makers and the research field

As an experienced primary headteacher, the research has been a significant learning experience and a challenge to carry out on a part time basis. It has offered periods of intensive reflection and an opportunity to engage deeply with theory; being a primary headteacher and carrying out the research concurrently has been immensely insightful and relevant. From a study of the literature and the unique experience of visiting so many successful primary schools and talking at length with 'the key players', so many relevant ideas and strategies have been learnt, and during the course of the investigation applied in the researcher's school with some considerable success.

The research is relevant reading for primary school headteachers and other school leaders, particularly the perceived characteristics of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools. Potentially it offers huge insight into the quest for school improvement and achieving long lasting success, always pertinent and meaningful to all professionals with leadership roles in the system.

The investigation highlights the importance to headteachers of a twin track strategy of achieving good results to survive in the short term and broader measures of success for sustainability in the long term. More specifically clear school structures and whole school systems need to be balanced by good relationships and a positive ethos. Secondly heads and leaders at all levels would benefit from attending courses on and reading about strategic leadership; in school they need to invest in people and develop leadership capacity, particularly strategic wisdom, historical understanding, absorptive capacity and adaptive capacity. Thirdly headteachers need to evaluate the deployment of teaching assistants and review how their contribution impacts on the school's success. Fourthly they need to explore the use of strategic abandonment and have the courage to say 'no' when setting leadership priorities. Finally they need to demonstrate further evidence of selflessness by encouraging and persuading other leaders in school to be career minded and move on to leadership posts in other schools.

For government policy makers, the most important implication, which is obvious yet worth stating again, is getting the 'right headteacher', because effective leadership seemed to be central to each school's sustainable success and making a positive difference to children's lives. Of course this is a local strategic decision for governors in collaboration with the relevant authority. However strategically national government needs to ensure that recruitment and retention procedures are appropriate and attractive, positively encouraging headteachers to commit to the community and stay in post long enough to achieve sustainable success. A second suggestion from the investigation would be that the OFSTED framework should give more credit to strategic measures of success than it does at the present moment, rather than be driven by results. Two further issues need to be tackled by government policymakers. Firstly there is a tension in the system which can only be resolved nationally; on the one hand primary schools are encouraged and are attempting successfully to develop leadership capacity at all levels, whereas on the other hand teachers in some schools and teacher unions, with the introduction of the TLR structure, are insisting non-TLR posts do not have a leadership dimension. Secondly, in response to the reluctance of staff to move on, it is suggested that a system of financial incentives to departure schools may stimulate successful schools to encourage potential leaders to go on to leadership promotion at another school. In terms of training, it would be advantageous for local and national providers to organise more courses on strategy, strategic leadership and sustainability.

The research was small scale and focused on successful primary schools to investigate how successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools could be created by describing the

characteristics they would demonstrate. Research in this area is limited and a large scale study is desirable, as potentially it could be powerful in helping schools achieve long lasting success. 'Strategic abandonment' is an underdeveloped tool in primary schools and further research on its use and potential use may be beneficial.

5.9   Creating successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools

From the evidence gained from the investigation, the characteristics of successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools described in the literature review have been revised. As a model, it is ideal; in practice not all aspects would be expected to be found in each school. However it is projected from the literature on success, strategy and sustainability and revised in the light of findings from the research and as such is a framework to which to aspire to achieve long lasting success.

1.   Effective leadership is crucial. This is the leadership of many at all levels, not just a single leader. However, the contribution of the headteacher, particularly the quality of his or her strategic leadership is vital to primary schools being successful and sustainable.

2.   Successful, strategic, sustainable primary schools achieve good results in the short term and show upward trends over time. Headteachers intervene strategically if and when results unexpectedly dip.

3.   These schools also provide a broad, balanced, enriched and differentiated curriculum which encourages deep and lifelong learning, valuing thinking and understanding. They demonstrate that every child matters and consider children's interest and motivation, engage them in their learning and sustain positive attitudes.

4.   Headteachers recognise the importance of the sustained contribution of staff in raising standards and nurture their well-being and professional development. They invest in people and develop leadership capacity at all levels. They need to demonstrate further evidence of selflessness by encouraging and persuading potential leaders to be career minded and move on to leadership posts in other schools.

5. Successful, strategic, sustainable primary schools have a dual commitment to the short term and the long term and focus on strategic thinking which involves other stakeholders in the strategic journey to sustainable success. They should make greater use of strategic abandonment and timing as part of their self-evaluation system to reject initiatives, to reduce workload and to achieve work/life balance.

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Appendices

1st draft of "Codes for analysis"

Codes

St…………Strategy

St / aband……………… abandonment
St / abs………………… absence
St / comm……………… communication
St / con………………… consult
St / const……………….. constraint
St / dec………………… decision
St / def………………… definition
St / dir………………….. direction
St / feel………………... feelings
St / gb………………….. governing body
St / learn……………….. learning – coaching, courses, CPD, shadowing, alongside
St / lead……………….. leadership
St / links……………….. links
St / mot……………….. motivation
St / opp………………… opportunity
St / plan……………….. planning
St / prior……………….. prioritising
St / resp govt…………... response to government initiatives
St / succ……………….. success
St / tim………………… timing
St / vis………………….. vision
St / peop. wisd………… people wisdom
St / cont. wisd…………. contextual wisdom

Su……………Sustainability

Su / fin………………… finance
Su / govt……………….. government
Su / num……………….. numbers
Su / par. ex…………… parental expectations
Su / net………………... network
Su / pred……………….. prediction
Su / relat……………….. relationships
Su / staff……………….. staffing
Su / stand……………… standards
Su / CPD………………. continuous professional development   AT/07/05

Interview guide

How is your school successful?

What do you understand by 'strategy'?

When do you think your leadership is strategic?

What aspects of your school planning is strategic?

How do you go about translating the strategy into action?

How do you develop leadership capacity in your staff?

What steps do you take to ensure success for the school in the long term?

In responding to new initiatives or change, have you had to give something up? Any examples?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about success, strategy or sustainability?

'selective abandonment' and 'intelligent neglect'

In setting priorities, activities and programmes judged to have the least impact on learning are abandoned to achieve balance and stability.

'rejection'

Saying no to new initiatives and 'big opportunities' without feeling guilty.

'opting out' or 'irresponsible abandonment'

This is where leaders in the school know they will be retiring in a few years and so do not invest in the planning and preparation nor gain the personal commitment of staff to make the initiative a success.

'enforced abandonment'

This is where successful programmes have to be abandoned because of factors such as staffing changes, falling rolls, finance or external constraints.