THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Leading Academies: challenge and complexity. An examination and analysis of the nature and dimensions for successful leadership.

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by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the response of the government in recognising the need for specific training for headship, albeit belatedly and against a trend in falling levels of recruitment to senior leadership positions in schools nationally, has led to serious attention being given to the issue.

In 2002 the first City Academy opened and with it a new set of senior educational leadership challenges. The central thesis of this research is that of an examination and analysis of the nature and dimensions for successful leadership of Academies bearing in mind the challenges and complexities of the task in hand. At the time of writing no specifically designed or defined programme exists to train or support those becoming or already working as Principals of Academies. The focus for this research is to investigate the leadership styles, qualities, skills and contextual dimensions which enable previously seriously underperforming schools to transform themselves under the leadership of a fast growing 'breed' termed Academy Principals.

At the start of this research 200 Academies were planned to be open by 2010. However the announcement by Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, in November 2006 to expand the programme to create 400 Academies further reinforces the importance of this research to investigate and report upon:
- the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;
- the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;
- the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;
- the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;
- the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;
- the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

The primary method of research is semi-structured interviews and case studies supported by review of literature.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first outlines the context and climate for creation of the Academies Programme, the key characteristics of such schools and the significance of the research in contributing to current knowledge in this field. The second chapter, through the examination and review of literature, establishes and outlines six key research elements to be further examined arising from the identified leadership dimensions pertaining to successful leadership of schools facing complexity and challenge. In doing so the conceptual framework model evolves and is introduced. Chapter 3 examines the possible research methodologies and approaches and considers the most appropriate forms for investigating the key elements arising from the initial thesis, subsequent review of literature and establishment of the conceptual framework model. The fourth chapter discusses the research findings and analysis from the semi-structured interviews and case studies using the six elements and applying them within the conceptual framework model. Chapter 5 provides an evaluation and makes recommendations, drawing conclusions from what has been established through the research. What can be learnt from best practice and suggestions on how to proceed in successfully leading Academies, with the programme expanding at a pace, are proposed as are opportunities for further lines of research.

The thesis as a whole not only provides new information on how the challenges and complexities of leading Academies can be successfully met and supported, but also how the identification and establishment of certain leadership skills and prerequisites summarized as key elements for leadership of schools of this type can be seen as part of a larger school improvement movement to address the need to improve standards in the most challenging schools.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the response of the government in recognising the need for specific training for headship, albeit belatedly and against a trend in falling levels of recruitment to senior leadership positions in schools nationally, has led to serious attention being given to the issue. The School-based Management Task Force, set up in January 1989 to facilitate school-based management training (DES 1990) set the wheels in motion and the training requirements of headteachers were further researched six years later (OfSTED *et al.* 1995). The HEADLAMP project was then launched for those in their first two years of headship, followed by the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) for aspirant headteachers which became mandatory in 2004. In 1998 the first national leadership programme for serving headteachers (LPSH) was launched followed by the establishment of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000.

In 2002 the first City Academy opened and with it a new set of senior educational leadership challenges. As a Labour government creation, the Academies programme is based on the success of the original 15 City Technology Colleges (CTCs) created by the Conservative government in the late 80's and early 90's to address the educational needs of young people in areas of social and economic deprivation in the inner cities in England. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (formerly the Department for Education and Skills – DfES) Academies web site claims that Academies 'bring a distinctive approach to school leadership drawing on the skills of sponsors and other supporters. They give Principals and staff new opportunities to

develop educational strategies to raise standards and contribute to diversity in areas of disadvantage.' How this is done though and the extent to which it is successful, forms part of the central thesis of this research, that of an examination and analysis of the nature and dimensions for successful leadership of Academies, bearing in mind the challenges and complexity of the task in hand. At the time of writing no specifically designed or defined programme exists to train or support those becoming or already working as Principals of Academies and the focus for this research is to investigate the leadership styles, qualities, skills and contextual dimensions which enable previously seriously underperforming schools to transform themselves under the leadership of a fast growing 'breed' termed Academy Principals.

Academies are all ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in highly innovative partnerships with central Government and local education partners. Sponsors and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) provide the capital costs for the Academy. Running costs are met in full by the DCSF. The Academies programme aims to challenge the culture of educational under-attainment and to deliver real improvements in standards. All Academies are located in areas of disadvantage. They either replace one or more existing schools facing challenging circumstances or are established where there is a need for additional school places. The DCSF expects Local Authorities (LAs) to consider the scope for the establishment of Academies as part of their strategic plans to increase diversity in secondary provision and improve educational opportunities. Each Academy promises to provide an excellent environment for teaching and learning that is comparable with the best available in the maintained sector whilst offering a broad and balanced curriculum to students of all abilities focusing especially on one or more

subject, curriculum or 'specialism' areas. The aim from the outset has been that as an Academy becomes successfully established it will share its expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community. Nowhere in the limited literature currently available is there mention of not succeeding. That appears to lie in the realms of the various media to deliver any negativity. Academies are, in reality at present, the last attempt at giving some of the poorest achieving and worst resourced schools a final radical boost in terms of buildings, resources, staffing and curriculum. As a highly Political programme and arguably an expensive one at face value, Academies cannot afford to fail in any respect. The spotlight has remained on them since their inception in September 2002. Initially the target published was to establish 200 in England by 2010. Since December 2006, based on early success indicators of the programme, a further announcement was made by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair to raise the number of Academies open or in development to a total of 400 within a similar timescale.

As well as ensuring that they provide the best opportunities for their young people, Academies have a key part to play in the regeneration of communities. A new Academy is a significant focus for learning for its children, their families and other local people. Academies aim to help break the cycle of underachievement in areas of social and economic deprivation whether in inner cities, suburban or rural areas. Each Academy promises to offer local solutions for local needs. Each is different, drawing on the expertise of its sponsors who contribute up to £2 million of the capital costs to help develop its own distinctive ethos and mission. Whether they involve new buildings, refurbishment, or both, Academies are unarguably innovative in design and built to high environmental standards. The question to be asked then is what sort of leader is required to accept the challenges and complexities to successfully run such powerhouses of

educational innovation, against a backdrop of high media profile, constant scrutiny by the inspection regimes whilst attempting to break free from the shackles of generations of underachievement and local deprivation which the feeder population embodies. It is the answer to this which forms the central research focus for this study.

CHAPTER 1   An Overview

1.1 Context

Set amidst arguably the largest school improvement programme ever in England, the initial proposal for the creation of 200 Academies by 2010, and now up to 400 within the same timescale, publicly funded independent schools with £2 million capital costs derived from sponsors, has placed the educational standards agenda firmly in the spotlight nationally. An announcement in July 2007 by Prime Minister Gordon Brown has since enabled local authorities and universities the opportunity to become involved as sponsors without having to find the £2 million previously required in the earlier days of the programme. The original City Academy policy was announced by David Blunkett, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment (DfEE), in March 2000 as 'a radical new approach to promote greater diversity and break the cycle of failing schools in inner cities'. He said then that the first of the Academies would open in 2000/2001 and would be set up 'where significant changes in the nature and management of schools were needed'. Schools would be expected to have innovative approaches to leadership, management, governance, teaching and learning. Sponsors would be needed to initiate these Academies. When the prospectus for City Academies was published by the Standards Unit of the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in May 2000, it said that sponsors could be 'businesses, individuals, churches and other faith groups, voluntary bodies, or partnerships within or across these categories'. There was, however, no public consultation over the prospectus before it was produced. This aspect has continued to fuel the argument of those against such schools ever since.

Academies are independent schools receiving government grants on conditions agreed with the Secretary of State. The original prospectus said that they are to be 'owned and run' by sponsors who would 'normally' be expected to set up a charitable company for the purpose. Current guidance says that the DCFS expects Academies to be set up as companies limited by guarantee with charitable status. Model articles and a memorandum of governance are made available by the DCFS and have been agreed with the Charities Commission. Essentially a trust is set up which is the company and the trust then appoints the sponsor governors on the governing body. In the draft model guidance it is suggested that sponsors might want to ensure that sponsor governors have the majority on the governing body. The governance arrangements are clearly modeled on those voluntary schools which are run by an ancient trust, for example livery companies such as the Haberdashers. The reality is that, in most cases, Academy Principals are also the Chief Executives of the Academies they lead and have fully devolved powers to run the schools whilst the role of the sponsor(s) is typically to offer support and expertise in areas pertaining to their field of specialism. Arguably many of the apparent myths and misinformation surrounding the governance, leadership and funding of Academies has been perpetuated by the media, keen to capitalize on the wave of political debate surrounding Academies in a similar way to what they did over ten years ago with the publicly funded independent City Technology College (CTCs) which have proved themselves to be some of the most successful schools in the country today.

There is no 'one type fits all' in terms of the structure or governance of Academies. Some are sponsored by individual entrepreneurs, others form part of an organisation which may have sponsored up to seven academies all with a similar structure, set of policies, ethos and curriculum. Some are formed through a process of federation whereby an existing successful

school takes under its umbrella a local school which is struggling thus creating a federation whereby the two schools can work together, often under the overarching leadership of an Executive Principal to raise standards in one school and broaden the scope of involvement of the other school. Some are sponsored by faith organizations, the local dioceses, and industrial or commercial conglomerates. More recently Local Authorities (Las) and universities have become involved as central sponsors. Some were originally City Technology College (CTCs) who have converted to Academies. What they all share is the commitment to provide high quality, innovative and technologically rich education to local young people who have been deprived of those opportunities for many years and to sharing their excellent facilities with the local community. At the time of writing, three Academies cater for children from 3 – 19, the majority offering secondary phase places for young people aged 11 – 18. Although outside the control of the Local Authorities and reporting directly to the Academies Division at the DCSF most Academies have become part of the wider educational provision for LAs and work closely in many respects, particularly on Excellence in Cities (EiC), Education Action Zones (EAZ), exclusions and with primary to secondary transition work. Beyond that the degree to which Academies choose to involve themselves in the work of the LAs is variable and dependent on local needs and situation. With some London and other Metropolitan Boroughs having as many as six Academies whereas others may only have one, the nature of operation with the LA is always dependent on context and the willingness of both parties to establish constructive and productive working relationships to the benefit of their young people.

The Funding Agreement, which sets out the basis upon which Academies are to be run, has to be agreed with the Secretary of State. This is the crucial document, including such issues as

the composition of the governing body, disposal of assets, financial and accounting requirements, and the admission of pupils.

The policy on Academies is a feature of the Government's search for ideas on how to raise standards by innovation in leadership, management, governance and teaching and learning. Speaking at the opening of the West London Academy, Ealing in 2003, Stephen Twigg, then Junior Schools Minister said, 'City Academies are leading the way in breaking down traditional ideological barriers in schools …. We don't expect Academies to be an overnight success, bearing in mind the legacy of underachievement that they may have to overcome, but we expect all Academies will make steady upwards progress.' (DfES 8.9.2003)

The drive to raise standards in difficult or challenging contexts has also become a central and urgent issue in education policy in other countries. In the USA, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is comparable to the relentless drive for system wide improvement through increased accountability and the subsequent penalties imposed upon underperforming schools in England.

A substantial international field of research into the connection between poverty and education demonstrates that, whilst the attainment levels of poor children have increased over time, the gap between the majority of children from low-income families and their more affluent peers persists throughout schooling (in the UK Rutter, Mortimer and Maugham 1979; Smith and Noble 1995); (in Australia Henderson 1975, Tees and Polesal 2003); (in the USA Apple 1982; Rainwater and Smeeding 2003). It is clear that schools in disadvantaged areas perform below the national norm and that these patterns of performance are long established. As Harris *et al*.

(2006, p.5) note, 'the more socially disadvantaged the community served by the school, the more likely it is that the school will appear to underachieve'.

The Labour government's Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances initiative, launched in 2001, incorporated both additional funding and inspection visits as a means of improving schools in contexts of disadvantage and was a major part of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit's efforts to raise educational standards in schools in the most challenging contexts. Notably these schools, located in disadvantaged areas suffered a myriad of socio-economic problems, including high levels of unemployment, physical and mental health issues, a movement out of the best qualified young people and low educational achievement. Many of the schools were typified with higher than average numbers of pupils with diverse ethnic backgrounds and low literacy levels on entry. The student population was often transient, thus presenting teachers and school leaders with the daily task of teaching pupils whom they have not taught before and have little if any prior knowledge of their leaning abilities. Coupled with the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention, often poor or inadequate resourcing and dilapidated buildings, it is these very 'challenging circumstances' which the Academies seek to address through taking over existing schools or closing and opening new schools, redefined and reborn as an Academy. As Power *et al.* (2003, p.26) conclude in their study, '[educational] outcomes in deprived areas are worse than those in non-deprived areas, whether they are measured in terms of qualification, attendance, exclusions or "staying on" rates. Inner-city areas in particular feature as having low outcomes'. They also point to the need to reduce the 'compositional effects that appear to result from high concentrations of disadvantaged students' (p.65). This seeming lack of 'cultural and social capital' makes it significantly more difficult for schools in challenging circumstances to improve. Furthermore,

it makes the task of leading schools in these circumstances all the more challenging too. The term 'cultural and social capital' derives from the work of Bourdieu (1987), who highlights the way that practices are infused (unequally) with social legitimation so that not all cultural practices are viewed as having equal value. Lamont and Lareau (1988, p. 156) define cultural capital as 'widely shared high status cultural signals used for social and cultural exclusions'. Implicit in this definition is the notion of inherent disadvantage perpetuated by a class system. In short, cultural capital and social capital are concerned with sustaining power relations and patterns of social and cultural domination. As Apple (2001, p.73) explains:

> 'more affluent parents often have more flexible hours and can visit multiple schools. They have cars – often more than one – and can afford driving their children across town to attend a 'better school'. They can as well provide the hidden cultural resources such as camps and after school programmes ….. that give their children an 'ease', a 'style' that seems 'natural' and acts as a set of cultural resources.'

The converse of this position is that parents and families in poor and disadvantaged communities are less able to 'work the system', leaving an ever increasing number of students in high poverty areas grouped together in the same school, thus reducing the social mix that has been shown, even with the 1950's grammar school system, to significantly influence a school's ability to improve its performance. This endemic social and cultural divide is but part of the challenge for the leaders of Academies if the children attending them are to escape the cycle of social injustice and poverty and, beyond that, their local communities are to rise from their current positions and become empowered in the workforce and economy, able to sustain their next generation of learners.

1.2 Significance of research

At the time of writing, although an ever increasing amount of research is being undertaken into school effectiveness and school improvement linked to leadership inputs and outcomes, very little focuses specifically on schools in high-poverty areas or schools with above average levels of deprivation. With some notable exceptions (Barth *et al.* 1999; Leithwood and Steinbach 2002; Borman *et al.* 2000, and Harris *et al.* 2006), the contemporary school improvement literature has not been overly concerned with schools facing difficult or challenging circumstances. Only relatively recently have researchers in England focussed their expertise and attention upon leadership in 'failing' or 'ineffective' schools; (Stoll and Myers 1998; Gray 2001; Harris and Chapman 2001). Furthermore, relatively few of these studies have focussed exclusively upon leadership practices or forms of leadership and demands upon leadership. Maden and Hillman (1993) found that schools that were improving in disadvantaged areas were characterised by improvement in their immediate environments with new buildings, landscaping and additional high quality facilities. However the overriding aspect which they highlight is that most improvement efforts were started and then driven by the Principal.

With 200 Academies initially planned to be open by 2010 and that number now increased to 400 within a similar timescale and their critical role in ensuring that the educational opportunities and life chances of their young people are addressed far beyond what has been the level experienced for many years, this research serves to investigate and report upon the initial elements of:

- the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;

- the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;

- the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;

- the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;

- the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;

- the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

With recruitment of school leaders in England at an all time low and retirement rates amounting to over fifty per cent of all secondary school heads by 2010 there is an urgent need to identify the prerequisites for effective leadership of these schools in the most challenging contexts. To ensure that the most capable leaders are well equipped to take on the challenge of leading Academies in the very near future, if the successes already being realised after so many years of failure under previous systems and regimes is to be developed and sustained long into the future, that work must be a priority for government and this research and recommendations a key contributor to what must be done to achieve it.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The key premise of this research lies in the well-known and validated fact that a school's leadership plays an unprecedented role in determining a school's success and there is a very strong belief in the ability of leaders to promote and generate school improvement. This is reinforced in the research literature, which consistently emphasizes the powerful relationship between leadership and school development. Hallinger and Heck (1998) report that heads have

an indirect, but highly measurable effect on students' achievement. The overriding message is clear – effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students (Leithwood and Jantzi 2000). The research evidence consistently demonstrates that the quality of leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom. Hallinger and Heck (1996) in their comprehensive and systematic reviews of the literature across all types of schools conclude that the effects of school leadership on pupil outcomes were educationally significant. In schools that are improving in difficult or challenging circumstances the quality of leadership has consistently been shown to be a major contributory factor (Hopkins 2001 and Reynolds *et al* 2005). The challenge here is to identify and establish the leadership skills, attributes and ways in which they are exemplified within the context of an Academy to ensure that leadership is successful. In doing so it is intended to ensure that not only the characteristics of effective Academy leaders are laid bare, but that the many interrelated dimensions which the leaders of these most challenging schools outside the research literature of any previously established operational or strategic framework are able to excel in securing organisational improvement. Furthermore, this needs to be undertaken at a pace to transform school outcomes and then sustained and even replicated within and beyond the Academy movement.

Harris *et al.* (2006, p.150) in their study of the eight schools involved in the OCTET project earlier in 2002/3, a substantial piece of research and development work commissioned by the DfES on Schools Facing Exceptionally Challenging Circumstances (SfECC), note how in

'addition to building personal capacity and organizational capacity as important elements of raising attainment..... the heads developed interpersonal capacity within their schools

by focussing on relationships. Attention was paid to developing an understanding of how individuals interact in everyday situations. They also concentrated on sharing information between staff and improving cooperation within the school. This led to the establishment of shared values and belief systems within the staff, which in turn was reflected throughout the pupil population.'

Interpersonal dynamics, the concept of effective teams, transformational and sustainable dimensions, enhanced accountability, technical skills to name but some of the aspects which are raised in what follows set this research in the international context of school leadership. Whilst providing real leadership voices for the men and women who have taken the challenge of leading Academies and tested leadership theories through practice to the extreme, the theoretical and established literature on the subject serves to frame and challenge the practice and success of these Principals.

1.4 Limitations and constraints of the study

This study, by necessity, focuses on a selection of Academies which have been open and in operation for three or more years at the time of writing. With the original government target of 200 open Academies in England by 2010 now raised to 400 within a similar timescale, the rate of expansion has necessitated careful selection of Academies, not only in terms of those whose leadership has remained stable for the better part of the period of the research, but which reflect a breadth of geographical location, gender of Principals, specialism of their particular Academy and type of sponsor. As with much qualitative research, the time taken to travel to and conduct, transcribe, code and analyse interviews, the need to accommodate the

respondents to fit around their own working commitments, coupled with the timescale for completion of the interviews to ensure that it took an appropriate picture of the Academies movement in a twelve month window required careful planning.

The lack of any published research on the specific subject of leadership of Academies to date has demanded that much of the initial work on this thesis is grounded in the literature of industrial and educational leadership *per se* and the analysis of the interviews with Academy Principals which form the latter chapters of the work provides a unique and original insight for the final recommendations and evaluation.

Perhaps the most important constraint in terms of time and ability or necessity to retain objectivity was that of the researcher becoming Principal of her own Academy mid-way through the research. This posed an additional issue of the need to complete the interviews as quickly as possible into the post before any possibility of her own bias in conducting the interviews as a serving Principal herself and the subsequent reaction of respondents to an 'insider' may come into play. Much has been written about the role of practitioner-researcher but notably amongst the positive factors is that anyone carrying out a sequence of studies in a particular setting that they are familiar with can build up a specialised expertise about that type of setting or context which may well be unrivalled. Allen-Meare and Lane (1990) have argued that there is a potential synergy between research and practice in their observations of practitioners working in the fields of education and social work. In contrast Winter (1989, pp.34-7) makes the point that there is a need for practitioner-researchers to establish a clear difference between the research and the procedures of professional practice itself, to guard

against the 'we knew that already' tendency. In the case of this research the excellent supervisory support of two supervisors appointed by the University of Hull from the start of the research and throughout the writing of this thesis provided invaluable challenge and focus on each stage of the research process, its methods and writing up.

The original research proposal and thesis was based on 'an investigation into the interface between public (education) and private (business) sectors in relation to leadership of secondary schools with a key focus on leadership of Academies.' The aim then of the research was to establish the degree of involvement of each and the extent to which Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education is impacting on leadership to operate in a new environment. However, very early into the research it became clear that there was little in terms of actual PPP with regard to leadership of Academies, with the role of the 'private' or sponsor element being that of support, advice and guidance from their own field. Principals were generally left to lead as they saw fit as the educational leadership professional and sponsors certainly did not interfere in the running or strategic direction of the Academies but supported and challenged as a 'critical friend' to a greater or lesser degree. This deliberate and necessary shift after six months from the original thesis, which also took into account the fact that this study has been made possible through a fully funded Research Associateship from the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) reflects the highly political nature of the work. Independent from, although funded by the government, the NCSL is mindful of the need to ensure political neutrality in its work. At the point of application for research funding in April 2005 the level of public and media attention on the Academies programme was at an all time high and so the original research proposal was deemed 'safer'. A year later and the weight of the Academies

programme became such that it was felt that, as a platform for leadership research and development which could make a difference to the success of the education system in England and beyond, this research could be formally focussed on leadership of Academies whilst retaining the funding from the NCSL to enable it to proceed and provide the gravitas which national publication by the NCSL would ensure. It is, therefore, through this process that this research thesis of *Leading Academies: challenge and complexity. An examination and analysis of the nature and dimensions for successful leadership* has come about. The realignment of the work has enabled substantial refinement of focus whilst incurring considerable additional time and work to do so. Nevertheless, the original constraints which the then political context of the work was limited by has been removed and what follows is a free reflection and analysis of the prerequisites and challenges of leading Academies successfully at the time of writing.

CHAPTER 2   Literature Review

2.1 The Nature and Meaning of Leadership

In their extensive analysis of the breadth of leadership paradigms, Leithwood *et al.* (1999) start by noting the extent to which 'times change' and so does leadership in response to it with 'productive leadership [depending] heavily on its fit with the social and organizational context in which it is exercised'. (p. 3). Leadership as a concept and a set of practices has been the subject of a vast quantity of academic and popular literature, most of which has been about particular approaches or models of leadership. As a term leadership is used frequently both inside and outside organisations, often typically prefaced with adjectives such as 'outstanding', 'good', 'inadequate'; in fact terms which the Office for Standards in Schools (OfSTED), the inspection body for England, themselves have coined. But at its grass roots what does leadership actually mean and, if there can be definitions or characteristics, would this make things better for us? Yukl argues that,

> 'It is neither feasible not desirable at this point in the development of the discipline to attempt to resolve the controversies over the appropriate definition of leadership. Like all constructs in social sciences, the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no "correct" definition.' (2002, p. 4-5)

This has been echoed by others writing on leadership such as Bennis (1959). But others, including Clark and Clark disagree, arguing that, 'You cannot talk about leaders with anyone

until you agree on what you are talking about. That requires a definition of leadership and a criterion for leadership acts that can be agreed on (1990, p. 20). Rost, similarly begins his analysis of leadership and leadership literature in non-school organisations by arguing that lack of definition has been one of the main impediments to progress in the field. He notes that, 'over 60 per cent of authors who have written on leadership since about 1910 did not define leadership in their works' (1991, p.6).

Senge (1996, p. 45) asserts how '… we are coming to believe that leaders are those people who 'walk ahead', people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organizations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings.' Whether these skills and capabilities are developed from the springboard of existing leadership practice and literature or something more innate in successful leaders is open to discussion later on in the context of this study. Handy (in Hesselbein *et al.*, 1996, p. 8) highlights three necessary leadership attributes: 'a belief in oneself… a passion for the job … and a love of people'. These bring with them paradoxes and needs for almost opposing attributes such as a 'capacity for aloneness'. Certainly living with these requires great strength of character and as Handy rightly recognises, 'Great leaders are bred from great causes, but leaders, at their best, also breed great causes'. Notably in those arenas where profit is not the central motivator we are more likely to find such great leaders who are not at the mercy of the shareholders and where the stakeholders value intrinsic rewards such as that traditionally perceived by those in the state education sector.

Leadership is defined by Bush and Glover (2003, p. 8) as:

'a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school which is based on clear personal and professional values.'

A central element in many definitions of leadership is that there is a process of influence.

'Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or groups] to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation.' (Yukl, 2002, p.3)

Cuban's (1988) definition shows that the process of influence is purposeful in that it is intended to lead to specific outcomes, 'Leadership, then refers to people who bend the motivations and actions of others to achieving certain goals; it implies taking initiatives and risks.' (ibid., 1988, p.193). In this research study the power of influence can be assessed in terms of the degree of success of transforming and reengineering schooling and all its component parts through its leadership. Leadership may be understood as a form of 'influence' but this is a neutral idea in that it does not explain or suggest the goals or actions which might be taken through this process. Wasserberg (2000, p. 158) claims that, 'the primary role of any leader [is] the unification of people around key values.' Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) add that leadership begins with the 'character' of leaders, expressed in terms of

personal values, self-awareness and emotional and moral capability. Furthermore, Day, Harris and Hadfield's (2001) research in 12 'effective' schools in England and Wales concludes that 'good leaders are informed by and communicate clear sets of personal and educational values which represent their moral purpose for the school' (ibid., p. 53).

The importance of vision as an essential component of effective leadership is further developed by Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989) who, drawing on the work of Bennis and Nannus (1985), note four emerging generalisations which related directly to vision:

1. Outstanding leaders have a vision for their organisations.
2. Vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the organisation.
3. Communication of vision requires communication of meaning.
4. Attention should be given to institutionalising vision if leadership is to be successful.

Essentially, these are normative views about the centrality of vision for effective leadership. However the research conducted into five primary schools by Nias, Southworth and Campbell (1992) shows that their heads 'provided a vision for the staff and the school' (ibid., p.46). Southworth (1993, pp. 23-24) suggests that what motivates heads to work hard is the fact that 'their leadership is the pursuit of their individual visions' (ibid. p.47). Whilst Dempster and Logan's (1998) study of twelve Australian schools shows that almost all parents (97 per cent) and teachers (99 per cent) expect the Principal to express his or her vision clearly, 98 per cent of both groups expect the leader to plan strategically to achieve the vision. Although it appears

in the literature that the articulation of a clear vision by leadership is important in the successful development of schools, it raises the question of the extent to which a specific and unique vision can be generated bearing in mind the centrality of government prescriptions of policies and also curriculum, even in the case of Academies. The strategic elements of this debate will be discussed shortly in this Chapter.

The majority of terminology associated with current published academic or theoretical debate on the nature of leadership and definitions and models, particularly those associated with leadership in education, derives from North America, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The most frequently mentioned specific concepts of leadership which have arisen throughout the reviews of literature on the subject include: transactional leadership; transformational leadership; strategic leadership; political leadership; passionate leadership; entrepreneurial leadership; invitational leadership; distributed leadership and sustainable leadership. The enormity of literature reviewed for this Chapter prohibits a detailed discussion of each type of leadership type, style or dimension within the study, although several key aspects will be discussed variously. Some of the most robust attempts to assess the evidence about the effects of school leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b; Hallinger & Heck, 1998), do not actually distinguish between different forms of leadership. Furthermore, although there are some exceptions such as Duke (1987), on 'instructional leadership' and Hallinger & Murphy (1985), many forms of leadership tend to be more typically treated as slogans rather than precise models of leadership that would lend themselves to empirical research.

However, what is clear from the base at which all Academies start is that a radical change in the *way* in which the school is led and the *direction* it is led in is required to shake off the years of underperformance and to change community and general perception of what can be achieved. It is about shattering myth and preconception and driving a determined programme of success and achievability for all involved. The extensive body of work on school leadership reviewed for this study makes significant comment and observation on the impact leadership has on establishing the conditions for school improvement and student learning in environments and contexts which can be applied in certain respects to Academies. However specifically in what respect and the extent to which each can be applied is a major element in the identification process for this thesis. Furthermore, as with all research, it must be borne in mind the possibility that some of the leadership dimensions and elements identified from the review of literature may indeed present a quite contrary set of results on the leadership dimensions required for Principals of Academies. This strategy of using various types of leadership literature to identify key dimensions could indeed itself be flawed. There is no exact science in any approach to research but since the majority of literature available currently refers to headteachers of schools rather than Principals of Academies, it could be argued that it is illogical to expect that similar leadership dimensions will exist given the challenges and breadth of the role. To counter this some of the discussion regarding leadership not only refers to that within the context of schools but in the wider realms of leadership of organisations. In addition to using leadership literature in the identification of key dimensions which may apply to leadership of Academies, this could be complimented further by an examination of the skills which the writer would expect from her own experience. However in attempting to maintain a degree of objectivity reference is made to school improvement

literature as well as literature purely on leadership. It is this rationale from which an extended discussion and examination of the literature relating to several types of leadership which may directly relate to some of the issues raised in this thesis follows and from which some of the key elements forming the research questions and lines of investigation for this thesis evolve. It is also from this that an initial model for leadership of Academies in light of this review of literature can be developed and further challenged through the research undertaken in this study.

2.2 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is often contrasted with the transformational leadership model examined next in this Chapter. Miller and Miller (2001, p. 182) provide arguably one of the most coherent explanations of these leadership concepts thus:

> 'Transactional leadership is leadership in which relationships with teachers are based upon an exchange for some valued resource. To the teacher, interaction between administrators and teachers is usually episodic, short-lived and limited to the exchange transaction. Transformational leadership is more potent and complex and occurs when one or more teachers engages with others in such a way that administrators and teachers raise one another to higher levels of commitment and dedication, motivation and morality. Through the transforming process, the motives of the leader and follower merge.'

This definition refers to transactional leadership as a process of exchange. This can be translated in real terms as Principals having authority arising from the position they hold as formal leaders of organisations. However they also hold power in the form of rewards such as salary enhancements, promotion and references. School leaders require the co-operation of staff to secure school effectiveness and an exchange may secure benefits for both parties. The shortcoming of this is that it does not engage staff beyond the immediate gains arising from the transaction so there is no sustainability and longer term commitment arising directly from this form of leadership. It therefore needs to be employed as part of a 'package' of leadership repertoires and timing as to when to be used is essential in either making or breaking the morale and motivation of staff and the subsequent success or failure of the organisation and its effect on student learning outcomes. When viewed in the context of the recession in the 1980s and the impact on the private sector the previously common-place practices of golden hellos, annual bonuses and stock options, there was an urgency for leadership to address the removal of the previous expectation of such 'perks' and a re-evaluation of how to replace such extrinsic rewards with intrinsic ones. Similarly, the reduction in capital resourcing within schools, pressures for teachers to work through some of their much coveted long holiday time to ensure originality and creativity in lesson planning, preparation and resourcing and an introduction of accountability for both student performance and their own started to mirror the changes in the private sector. It is in this climate of global economic and micro-political change that the seeds of transformational leadership as we know it today has emerged.

2.3 Transformational Leadership

As a term, transformational leadership appears with increasing frequency in writings about education since the late 1980s. As leadership faced the challenges of 'restructuring' in the mid to late 1990s the term tended to signify the type of leadership required to successfully perform this function. In this context, the term is used in a common-sense, non-technical manner, that is taking a dictionary definition to 'transform' as 'to change completely or essentially in composition or structure' (Webster, 1971). Any leadership with this effect may therefore be termed transformational. However, the focus here is on the subject of formal definition and systematic enquiry related to the process within the Academy system. All transformational approaches to leadership share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to the goals of the organisation on the part of leaders' colleagues. This increased capacity and commitment is assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity. But this does not necessarily equate with the 'rank' or position those involved in helping transform the organisation may hold. Rather, the authority and influence which this form of leadership brings with it leads to members of the organisation seeking to inspire their commitments to collective aspirations. Recent evidence suggests that practices associated with transformational leadership may be widely distributed throughout an organisation (Leithwood *et al*., 2004). Therefore this is not some form of 'heroic' or 'super head' leadership which the press and even educational academics have sometimes coined as headings in their commentary on leadership of Academies (The Independent, 6 October & 30 October 2005; Harris, A., 2004; Qureshi, Y., 2006).

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) note that there are both academic as well as practical origins of transformational leadership. Downton's (1973) study of rebel leadership is often cited as the beginning of academic interest in, and systematic inquiry about, transformational leadership in non-school organisations. However, charisma, often considered an integral part of transformational leadership, has it origins in the work of Max Weber (1947). Burns (1978) argued that transformational leaders appeal to the personal goals and values of the colleagues in their organisation and work both to elevate and transform these goals and values in the collective interest. Bass (1985) launched a series of empirical studies about transformational orientated leadership and this prompted an increase in interest in the approach with other theorists in non-school contexts adopting the notion and exploring its nature (Yammarino *et al.* 2003), causes (Druskat, 1994), and consequences (Kahai *et al*., 2003). The reality is that transformational leadership has assumed a dominant position in how both theorists and researchers frame successful leadership.

The practical or organisational realisation of transformational leadership started through the worldwide economic recession in the mid-1980s as noted previously, when transactional leadership of large corporations faced huge challenges having developed a form of social contract with their employees in exchange for an unwritten agreement of loyalty and employment security. This changed with the recession, being replaced by widespread job losses, downsizing of organisations and no guarantee of employment in the future. Leaderships response to this was the seeds of what has become the model for transformational leadership. Schools, at least those in the public sector, were slower to follow but were soon also feeling the impact of the recession in funding in ways not previous experienced. In fact

not only was the impact financial for schools, but loss of public confidence in schools as a means of social improvement led to other offshoots of the recession including the introduction of the National Curriculum as an attempt to address the demands of public mood. For the first time schools felt the pressure of heightened expectations of student performance and national policies for holding schools much more publicly accountable for such performance and for their use of financial resources were introduced. Being asked to do more, often with fewer resources whilst also ensuring that the gap in achievement was closed between students who traditionally do well in schools and those who do not, brought with it a raft of aids or tools, in fact a way of the market capitalising on a new direction in education. The result – the need for more money when the reality was that less was available (Molnar, 2002).

Whether Bass's (1997) four categories, previously the basis for non-school perspectives on transformational leadership, can be seen as necessary elements for leadership of schools, particularly those in challenging circumstances requiring rapid pace in improvement such as Academies is noteworthy, they being:

- **charisma** – practices which arouse strong emotions and identification with the leader's personal qualities and/or sense of mission
- **inspirational leadership** – communicating an appealing vision and modelling exemplary practices consistent with that vision
- **individualized considerations** – providing support and encouragement to employees for their efforts and opportunities to develop further

- **intellectual stimulation** – practices which increase followers' awareness of problems and encourage them to think about their work in new ways

  (cited in Davies, B. 2005, p. 37)

These may indeed be necessary for successful leadership but whether they are sufficient is another matter. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass goes one step further by assessing the additional transactional factors such as job satisfaction and extra effort on the part of employees in transformational models of leadership in accomplishing successful outcomes (Dickson *et al.*, 2003; Yukl, 1999) and should be considered as part of the methodology for eliciting participant responses for this study.

Leithwood *et al.* (1999) provide the most fully developed model of transformational leadership linked specifically to school organisations to date. This model, in recognition of what it is about schools that are unique challenges Bass's (1997) proposed model and categories, stating instead that transformational leadership in fact:

- depends not at all on charismatic practices or leader characteristics
- assumes wide distribution of its practices and functions across roles within and outside the school
- focuses as much or more on building the capacity of staff as on motivating them
- takes the creation of opportunities for collaborative work among staff as a major challenge to be addressed

- acknowledges the interdependent relationships among leadership and managerial activities

- works towards the creation of roles in schools for parents and members of the community as partners and co-producers of student learning.

(Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. cited in Davies, B. 2005, p. 39)

This model consists of three broad categories of leadership practices: setting goals and directions; developing people; and redesigning the organisation. They are not prescriptive but allow for the discretion and adaptation on the part of school leaders. For example it is not desirable or advisable, they argue, to go about setting high expectations at every turn. Rather, one looks for such opportunities when an assessment of how the greatest effect might be achieved by employing them. Each of these three broad categories is worthy of attention here with a view to assessing their validity and practical realisation within this research study.

In order for transformational leadership to achieve its impact it is important for staff to develop shared understandings about the school including its goals and direction. This common understanding of a sense of purpose or vision Leithwood and his colleagues claim, help motivate people and establish the goals as challenging yet achievable. This also helps to put both their own identity and work in context thus giving meaning to the improvement task in hand. Bennis and Nanus (1985) also note how visioning and establishing purpose are further enhanced by monitoring the performance of an organisation and by promoting effective communication.

If work-related motivations are assisted through the establishment and communication of clear and compelling organisational goal setting and direction, it is this, coupled with the direct experiences which members within the school have with leadership that influences their ability to engage with the necessary practices required to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The work of McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) in highlighting the extent to which personal attention devoted by a leader towards an employee and the use of employee's capacities increases levels of enthusiasm and optimism and reduces frustration and lack of understanding of organisational direction, not surprisingly indirectly increases performance. Through consciously and deliberately developing people, this aspect of transformational leadership is further predisposed to accelerating improvement outcomes and communicating it within the whole organisation.

The importance of considering the role of transformational leadership in this study which examines and analyses the nature and dimensions of successful leadership of Academies stems from the third category of leadership practice identified by Leithwood *et al.*, that of redesigning the organisation. By creating conditions in their schools which support and sustain the performance of associate staff as well as teaching staff and students, this practice acknowledges the importance of collective or organisational learning and the building of professional learning communities as key contributors to teacher work and student learning. Such collaborative processes focus on ensuring broad participation in decision-making and the ongoing refinement of both routine and non-routine administrative processes by way of ensuring that everyone in the organisation can perform their jobs without excessive bureaucratic or administrative burden or obstacle, often a criticism of seriously

underperforming schools and inadequate leadership. This in itself is a significant leadership challenge which the notion of strategic leadership which will now be discussed can offer possible conceptual and practical frameworks for realising.

2.4 Strategic Leadership

Much has been talked about operating strategically in many domains since serious writing on educational leadership took hold in the 1980's. Further developments into the realm of strategic management with Mintzberg *et al.* (1998) put the importance of strategy as a high point of managerial activity firmly on the map yet importantly focussed on its application in the school setting, albeit preferring the focus to be on that of managerial rather than leadership capacity. For Mintzberg (1998, pp. 9-14) to the lay-person strategy can broadly be defined in five phrases: strategy is a plan – a direction , a guide or course of action into the future; strategy is a pattern, that is, consistency in behaviour over time; strategy is a position, that is, the placing of particular products in particular markets at a particular time; strategy is a perspective, that is, an organisation's particular way of going about doing things; and strategy is a ploy – a specific action or 'manoeuvre' intended to outwit an opponent or competitor. Like much terminology coined in writings on educational leadership there are numerous attempts at defining 'strategy'. However arguably the work of Davies *et al.* in the late 1990s onwards captures the essence and depth of substance of what actually constitutes strategy in the context of leadership in action. Davies and Davies (2005, p. 11) note that:

'Strategic leadership is not a new categorization or type of leadership such as transformational leadership or learning-centred leadership. Rather it is best considered as the strategic element within the broader leadership paradigm.'

They list four stages of strategic leadership: direction-setting; translating strategy into action; aligning the people and the organization to the strategy; determining effective intervention point; developing strategic capabilities. However the challenge for any leader is to be able to launch from first base by developing the ability to be able to think strategically. Garratt (2003, p.2) explains that:

'Strategic thinking is the process by which an organisation's direction-givers can rise above the daily managerial processes and cries to gain different perspectives of the internal and external dynamics causing changes in their environment and thereby giving more effective direction to their organisation. Such perspectives should be both future-oriented and historically understood. Strategic thinkers must have the skills of looking both forwards and backwards while knowing where their organisation is now, so that wise risks can be taken by the direction-givers to achieve their organisation's purpose, or political will, while avoiding having to repeat the mistakes of the past.'

As Davies (2006, p.16) notes: 'Strategy also involves taking a view of *broader core issues* and themes for developments on the school, rather than the detail of day-to-day imperatives.'
This is worth particular consideration in the context of leading a school such as an Academy where both internal challenges and complexities form part of the everyday landscape, often

without relief and set against historical relics of underachievement or neglect and current and future expectation of rapid success and improvement. The central challenge lies in finding the time to both reflect and project strategic thought when bombarded from all angles as a leader of an Academy. The ability to both see and think or think and see, to take the famous definition of strategic thinking provided by Mintzberg (3003, pp 79-83) as 'seeing' demands leadership to be able to both see where they are going and also where they have come from, in order to translate strategy into action and see it through. It is this process by which key characteristics and outcomes can be identified and judged that help form a practical realisation of strategic leadership in action.

Davies, Davies and Ellison (2005, p.66) identified six significant characteristics displayed and developed by strategic leaders in schools in their sample:

i.   they challenge and question; they have a dissatisfaction or relentlessness with the present
ii.   they prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning and build new mental models to frame their own and others' understanding
iii. they display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system
iv.   they have powerful personal and professional networks
v.   they have high quality personal and interpersonal skills

The extent to which, in what ways and if indeed at all, Academy leaders display these characteristics will be explored in Chapter 4 but serious consideration needs to be given in

relation to the actions or activities which Davies, Davies and Ellison (2005, p. 75) also note as characteristic of strategic school leader from their sample, these being:

- setting the direction of the school

- translating strategy into action

- aligning the people, the organisation and the strategy

- determining strategic intervention points

- developing strategic capabilities in the school

Freedman (2003, p. 2) explains that 'strategy is the framework of choices that determine the nature and direction of the organisation'. Whether this is based on the immediate position or the future of the organisation is not clear, but serves as a further useful tool to explore whether Academy Principals operate within a conscious strategic framework and whether it is this alone or coupled with other factors which contributes to the successful outcomes of their leadership. Similarly, the extent of their freedom and requirement to act in an enterprising and entrepreneurial manner to deliver successful outcomes in a different way than that traditionally expected of leaders in the state education sector deserves consideration in light of the literature reviewed.

2.5   Sustainable Leadership

As Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p. 1) recognise:

> 'sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership. But making leadership
> sustainable is difficult, too. Charismatic leaders may lift their schools to impressive
> heights, but the leaders' shoes are usually too big for successors to fill.'

A further issue which compounds this is that leaders all too often take their key people with
them thus leaving an even bigger void in the organisation they vacate. With the establishment
of models of effective and successful leadership comes the need for continuity, stability and
sustainability. At a time when over fifty per cent of existing secondary school head teachers in
England will be retiring within three years, keeping the momentum and establishing the
foundations upon which to develop further is never more critical for schools if this looming
leadership crisis is to be prevented. Furthermore, the demands on the new types of leadership
required for schools such as Academies, which, due to their nature were often set up and led
initially by very experienced Principals themselves in the last phase of their active leadership
careers, demands serious consideration if the progress made is to be sustained.

Schools are in the privileged position of creating the generations of the future (Durkheim,
1956). By their very structures they provide opportunity for school leaders to influence their
futures whilst also initiating children and young people into their own first experience of
taking leadership roles and positions of responsibility in the training ground which is
schooling. However, in a world where the pace of life is becoming ever faster (Giddens,

2000), where feelings of insecurity are the norm (Vail *et al*., 1999) and where the traditional trusted community relationships are fast disappearing (O'Neill, 2002), Hargreaves (2005, p. 175) notes how:

> 'in this period, our data show teachers now view their leaders as being more like anonymous managers who have less visibility among their staff, seem more attached to the system and their own careers than the long-term interests of the school, and rarely remain long enough to ensure their initiatives will last.'

In light of this evidence, it is not simply a matter of finding the right leaders or even training them in the competencies, but creating a system of leadership which can be sustained and lead to long-lasting success and improvement to the benefit of all in the school.

Sustainability is not to be confused with maintainability. Hargreaves and Fink (2003, p.696) make the point that:

> '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.'

In identifying ten principles of sustainable leadership, listed below, both the idea as a concept and a strategy can be considered along with its purpose, planned or intended outcome.

Principles of sustainable leadership	Function / Purpose
It matters	It creates and preserves sustaining learning
It lasts	It secures enduring success over time
It spreads	It sustains the leadership of others
It is socially just	It benefits all students and schools, not just a few
It is resourceful	It develops rather than depletes human and material resources
It promotes diversity and builds capacity	It cultivates and recreates a system with the capacity to stimulate ongoing improvement
It is activist	It engages assertively with its environment
It is vigilant	It monitors the environment to check it is in good health and not in decline
It respects the past	It reflects and builds on the past in its quest to create a better future
It is patient	It defers gratification instead of seeking instant results

Figure 2.5: Hargreaves and Fink – Ten principles of sustainable leadership (adapted from Davies, B. 2005, pp.176-186)

Although noble, it could be argued that some of these principles are suited to the period of consolidation and balance in the life cycle of a school rather than that of a highly challenging and complex beginning that Academies face. To 'be patient' in terms of student outcomes when generations have been failed by the predecessor regime, or 'respects the past' which has been detrimental to the opportunities and achievements of its children seem to negate the positives contained herein. However, sustainable leadership has to be seen as a whole, the principles fitting together and stretched out in time and space, not judged as a snapshot. This is the essence of sustainability. In Hargreave and Fink's words (2006, p. 274):

'Sustainable leaders sustain others as they pursue this cause together. Sustainable leaders also sustain themselves, attending to their own renewal and not sacrificing themselves too much as they serve their community. Sustainable leaders stay the course.'

This longitudinal commitment to sustainable leadership brings with it the opportunity to assess the characteristics of successful leaders, particularly those who serve in complex and challenging circumstances where the many theories and academic reasoning on leadership can be put to the test in real terms. Even taken in isolation, some of these principles may serve as a worthy starting point for an extended examination of the possible key characteristics of effective leaders arising from this review of literature and the subsequent examination and analysis of the leadership dimensions required when facing the challenges and complexities of leading Academies.

2.6   **Political Leadership**

Those in leadership positions in schools, particularly those with a long history of local authority and public control, often find politics distasteful. They strive to maintain the status quo and pacify unions, often at the expense of the improvements needed to secure better outcomes for students and the organisation as a whole. In fact the deeply entrenched fear of political action to secure change can be seen as one characteristic in those schools which were failing and have subsequently become Academies. Political manoeuvring is seen as manipulative, dishonest and subsequently destructive. However the meaning of political in this sense comes from the realistic lessons brought forth by Machiavelli years ago. Power and

conflict are natural by-products of co-operative activity to secure improvement. However political leadership requires familiarity with the strategies and tactics of power and conflict.

The extensive work of Pfeffer (1992) and Bolman and Deal (2003) draw out some key principles which will later be examined in the methods and strategies employed by effective Academy leaders. These include:

- **Mapping the political terrain** before making any move to ensure a good understanding of the way things stand. This also requires a knowledge of allies, opponents and those not taking a position. In doing this the subtle differences between a clear field and a mine field can be mapped before any action is taken.
- **Consolidating the power base** so that not only the legitimate power within the chain of command is available but also the inform power bases which may help augment or also destroy leadership progressing.
- **Setting out a clear agenda** helps focus everyone on the direction and also increase the chances of getting there. Very clear focus prevents detraction from the task in hand.
- **Making the move at the right time** is crucial. In politics timing is not necessarily everything but it is close. Acting first has the advantages of catching people off guard and compelling them to fall into line. However, delay also has its advantages in giving the leader more time to assess the situation and do some cajoling and persuading behind the scenes to garner further support. Delay can also serve to wear out and disarm the opponent. Weigh up which is the best strategy to use is key to effect the leadership change required successfully.

- **Using information as ammunition** is very powerful. Gathering data can help leaders reach the right informed decisions and strengthen the case. This can be especially useful in a context such as failing or underperforming schools where data is available but not readily used or understood to force staff or the authorities to face the reality and shatter any un-substantiated myths.

- **Using structure as a political asset** can be very effective in improving efficiency or effectiveness. Restructuring is also a useful way for leaders to consolidate and rationalise power. However, using structure as an asset, like all political tactics, requires an accurate appraisal of the 'political' terrain of the organisation and beyond it. It takes an astute leader to be able to make this type of judgement against the backdrop of heavy resistance such as is faced by many Academy programmes.

- **Befriending opponents is important.** Politics resolves around relationships and it is difficult to predict whether who is against a leader one day may be an important ally the next.

- **Creating arenas to air and resolve conflict** is essential since generally people shy away from conflict, preferring to smooth it over in public but strike back behind the scenes which can be very damaging for an organisation and its progress. It can also lead to the creation of factions. An arena where conflicts are aired and resolved reduces such a negative culture being built up. As Peck (1987, p.71) argues, 'A community is a place where conflict is handles with dignity and grace without unnecessary physical or emotional bloodshed and with wisdom as well as grace'.

The lack of leaders in the educational arena with skills in political leadership leaves a legacy of fostering grudges and things left undone. Machiavelli concluded that 'in politics, whether an action is good or evil can only be decided in the light of what it is meant to achieve and whether it successfully achieves it' (Bull, 1995, p. xx). This implies that politics always operates in a context of values. Academies cannot but challenge the legacy of things not done and therefore it may be seen that elements of political leadership come into play to secure success.

2.7 **Passionate Leadership**

At the core of successful school leadership must be a passion for learning, a passion for succeeding and the ceaseless energy and drive to make it happen. Passionate leadership should not be confused with charismatic leadership, although there may well be elements of charismatic leadership in those passionate leaders. Indeed, as Brighouse (2001, p. 4) notes, 'successful leaders can be charismatic and larger than life, but more often they are not. Indeed charisma often brings the danger of what Michael Fullan describes as "visions that blind", thereby debilitating the leadership potential of others in the community.' The deep conviction that underpins all passionate leadership and belief that all action and motivation comes from a deep felt sense of moral purpose and desire for social justice can be considered in relation to this study.

2.8 **Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Wood, Wood and Gunter (2006), in their study of 37 open Academies, note that 'academies are predominantly being constructed as sites intended to enhance the growing influence of private versions of entrepreneurialism.' (2006, p. 1). It can be argued that the environment from which Academies have emerged reflects a 'third way' commitment to combining private principles, values and ways of working with those of the public sector, with the aims of making the traditional public sector more innovative and entrepreneurial (Giddens, 1998; Milner and Joyce, 2005, p. 51). It has been argued that educational organisations specifically need entrepreneurial leadership that reflects something of the innovative and risk-taking capacity of private business (Hentschke and Caldwell, 2005). In some respects Academies can be seen as being hybrid organisations in which entrepreneurial imperatives can flourish. By combining characteristics of the private sector, such as being 'independently managed', 'promoted… by independent sponsors' (DfES, 2004, p.51) and free to innovate, with public sector characteristics, such as dependence on Government funding and expectations to contribute to social goals by tackling educational inequalities and contributing to the regeneration of communities, a third typology is evolving and with it the need for leadership to respond to the model and challenges.

Cuban (2004, p. 13) argues that, in publicly funded school policy, the entrepreneurial imperative has actually become normalised and that it is not something new. For him:

'The application of business-crafted solutions to public schools (better managers, getting the incentives right, choice, market competition, accountability) has become so

thoroughly embedded in policymakers' thinking about improving schools, particularly in urban districts, that these policies are now taken for granted and often seen as 'common sense' rather than as having been borrowed from the corporate closet.'

This may well be the case but making entrepreneurialism explicit and a leadership dimension driving improvement and challenging the status quo is another matter. To put it simply, entrepreneurialism – or entrepreneurship, the term used in much of the business literature – 'requires taking a view of the future, generating a vision around an idea, and then mobilising resources to achieve it' (Judge, 2005, p.53). This does not define entrepreneurialism as necessarily or only a private sector quality, but reflects the expanded meaning that enterprise and entrepreneurialism have come to encompass (du Gay, 2004). It has been argued that there is a kind of entrepreneur and entrepreneurial activity which is an identifiable characteristic of some public sector personnel (Zerbinati and Souitaris, 2005) though its appropriateness to public sector organisation and leadership practice is a matter for debate which would serve as a separate research study in itself.

Although there has been an acceleration in the number of programmes even at undergraduate level particularly in the USA delivering studies in dimensions of entrepreneurial management, only relatively recently in the work of Hentschke and Caldwell (2005) has the notion of school leadership, as opposed to management, as having an entrepreneurial dimension been formally articulated. Defined as 'a person who organizes and manages an enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable risk' (Webster's Dictionary as cited in Leisey and Lavaroni, 2000, p. 28) this sounds somewhat appealing but this has not been a characteristic

sought for or favoured by state school systems in general. The creation of the Academy programme in England with a focus on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial risk taking, not to mention generation of additional income where possible, has created a demand for a different type of leadership skill set of which entrepreneurship is just one option. More than ever schools are more like business in the way they are required to operate and their leaders more like business leaders. The number of school principals following MBA programmes is increasing year on year, the traditional academic MA courses in educational leadership and management being replaced by programmes which enable applied approaches to study based on real-time leadership situations such as those which private business and the corporate world have benefited from for many years. As Hentschke and Caldwell (2005, p.146) note:

'the 'fit' of educational entrepreneur in compulsory education systems is far from perfect and, we argue, applies at best only to a subset of all possible educational leaders and roles.'

The position of Academies which are able to opt out of some elements of the statutory National Curriculum, whilst being required to fulfil the national assessment schedules, may put them somewhere between the two stools - that of public and private education in terms of any consideration of entrepreneurial leadership and therefore better predisposed to take advantage of any leanings towards such a style of leadership. Hentschke and Caldwell (2005, p. 148) identify at least three characteristics which describe and to a large extent define entrepreneurial leaders:

'First, they have a unique idea that borders on a fixation…..Second, in order to transform their idea into a reality, they often have to 'go their own way' – to do whatever it takes…Third, they then operate and seek to grow the business as the concrete manifestation of their unique idea.'

This 'fixation' can be likened to a goal or achievement which drives their motivation and acts somewhat like a vision to be realised. In fact Hentschke and Caldwell (2005) recognise that certain attributes or skills associated with successful leaders seem to surface repeatedly in those leaders who are entrepreneurial in their approach. These five attributes are: sound financial management; excellent communication skills; ability to motivate others; having a clear vision for their organisation; and finally an ability to motivate themselves. In many respects these are complimentary to the attributes of entrepreneurs compiled by Leisey and Lavaroni through their research which they list as: 'tenacious, optimistic, creative, courageous, persistent, willing to take risks, resourceful, independent, opportunistic, and thoughtful' (2000, p.28).

Entrepreneurial activity is historically associated with for-profit enterprises and educational leaders do not typically create new ventures. However, arguably it is beginning to flourish with the legal introduction of new forms and models of schooling, particularly those established to address severe underperformance and social injustice such as Academies and, previously, the City Technology Colleges.

The spirit of business enterprise is central to the cultural messages inherent in the way many Academies appear to be working and frame their 'output' in terms of the core purposes of the organisation. Whitty, Edwards and Gewirtz's (1993, p. 46) study of the CTC initiative showed evidence of a concern to utilise entrepreneurial flexibility and creativity in the service or social aims. The Academies programme has taken this to the next level. Examples of individual Academy sponsors engaging in social entrepreneurialism are evident in the Academies programme. They include Arpad Busson, founder of the charitable foundation ARK (Absolute Return for Kids) and Chairman of EIM, a hedge funds investment group. Busson (May 2005) states that 'If we can apply the entrepreneurial principles we have brought to business to charity, we have a shot at having a really strong impact, to be able to transform the lives of children'. The multiple emphases on community welfare, responsiveness to and involvement of local people, working to improve the environment, participation in local regeneration and co-operation with other agencies, resonate with a commitment to the public ethos although the media claim otherwise in their reportage of the Academy programme. In fact it might be more accurate to claim that sponsors and stakeholders through their Principals are, arguably, taking the opportunity to develop a different kind of schooling with the greater good of the local community at its heart, and thus acting in an entrepreneurial fashion which aspires to meeting some of the complex aims in advancing the public good though the Academies programme. In this respect a type of new education 'firm' has been created. The British Government, in drawing on the contribution both financial and skills based of sponsors in establishing Academies, has enabled new growth of educational provider options to become available, that is they reduce the barriers to access for entrepreneurs who seek to help create additional or different schooling options. They, in turn, tend to look for leaders who are able to realise their

vision of education and school experience. This aspect of sponsor impact is central to this study and will be examined in Chapter 4.

Education in England has, since the mid 1980's existed in a culture of defending threats to their systems, largely as a result of the drive for increased accountability and targets. Such a climate is not conducive to the motivations of entrepreneurial approaches. However, the freedom to opt out of statutory requirements such as following the full national curriculum and the opportunity to create more innovative and personalised learning pathways and programmes as Academies provides opportunity for innovation, growth and development at a much faster rate than may arguably be achieved if constrained by traditional statutory requirements. The need for all schools to provide and work to both annual and longer term improvement plans is now embedded but entrepreneurial organisations rely also on business plans and forecasts which schools under the remit of Local Authorities do not have to consider. Academies, with their full control of all the finance, human resource and facilities functions are well suited to capitalise on their income generation streams and therefore need leaders who can seize these opportunities and exploit them to the benefit of their organisation. The fact that many Academy Principals are also the CEOs further reinforces this point as does the need for Directors of Finance and Resources to assist in this business model of organisational leadership. In pursuing new and additional forms of financial support, for entrepreneurial leaders this extends far beyond simply the financial capital. Tremendous time and energy is invested in building strategic alliances to strengthen and grow the organisation and it is this which the involvement of sponsors in setting up Academies distinguishes their position from being one of reliance on the status quo to having the connections to do things

differently and to have control over how it is done and why it is done. Although currently miniscule in educational leadership, as the requirements to lead in a different way grow and schools such as Academies continue to increase in number over the next few years, the role of entrepreneurial leadership will become part of the educational leadership cannon. In the meantime the extent to which such characteristics are evidenced by current Academy leaders is worthy of close examination later in this study.

2.9 **Invitational Leadership**

No man is an island, so the saying goes and for any approach to school leadership to work it has to combine all the elements of human nature and skills to function properly. In this way complex issues can be handled with skill and, at times, artistry so that everyone involved in the organisation feels genuinely part of the movement towards the goals. As Novak (2005, p.44) states:

> 'Invitational leadership is an attempt to focus an educator's desires, understandings and actions in order to create a total school environment that appreciates individuals' uniqueness and calls forth their potential. It is built on this guiding ideal that education is fundamentally an imaginative act of hope and this hope is communicated through persistent, resourceful and courageous practices… the role of invitational leaders is to encourage, sustain and extend the contexts in which imaginative acts of hope thrive.'

In schools in particularly challenging circumstances or with a history of perceived failure such as forms the basis of the majority of Academies, the loss of hope is arguably the single biggest

obstacle to harnessing the energies of staff to make the leap of faith and seize the opportunity to redefine and reengineer the way they do things. Re-staffing is one way of addressing the situation but capturing the right people amidst the backdrop of poor organisational reputation and media misrepresentation adds a further challenge to what is invariably the single most difficult task – getting the staffing right and treating them properly. Rather, being able to identify and release the potential of those staff already in the organisation who will be able to perform in a different way with a new leadership and take ownership of the direction of the school is quite a task bearing in mind the pressure of time to solve all the problems of the world overnight.

If any school is to succeed the foundations need to be in place from the start. With staffing the single greatest costs to a school, getting the way it works and the relationships to achieve successful outcomes right is paramount. Novak (2005, p. 45) has identified four foundations of invitational education which, he argues, provide the needed support for all that follows:

- ♦ the democratic ethos – an ethical and political commitment to the idea that all people matter and have the right to participate meaningfully in the rules that regulate their lives
- ♦ the perceptual tradition – a psychological perspective that takes seriously the democratic ethos by focusing on how things are seen from the point of view of the person

- ♦ self-concept theory – a viewpoint based in the perceptual tradition that all people are internally motivated to maintain, protect and enhance their perception of who they are and how they fit into the world

- ♦ the goal of educational living – an ideal that aims to have people able to savour, understand and better more of their individual and collective experiences.

From this basis, invitational leaders are able to develop working assumptions about what people are like and how they should be treated to get the best from them and for the organisation in turn.

If these foundations of invitational leadership act as the base then for them come several assumptions each of which actually moves things on in practice. Firstly that of respect, that people are valuable and responsible and should therefore be treated in ways that recognise and extend their talents and abilities. Education is based on co-operation and collaboration, therefore trust is essential if mutuality is to be achieved. Care is essential because of the way it affects the end results. If leaders are able to reveal potential in individuals which has been previously unknown the sense of optimism released can be enormously motivational. Finally potential can be realised in so many ways but there needs to be a deliberate intention that this will be the culture in which individuals are able to work and that development is invited both by the leader and others in the school by way of a cultural norm.

Changing the culture and ethos is a monumental challenge in any organisation, not least that in one where doing so is key to future success. How leaders get people to work together to

achieve a goal matters and it is possibly this faith or genuine belief that things can and will be better that motivates leaders of Academies to firstly take up the challenge and then convince others. As Novak (2005, p.59) says: 'It is not always easy to call forth, sustain and extend imaginative acts of hope, but it can get easier and it is worth the effort'. Whether this is the experience or practice, either conscious or otherwise, of the Academy Principals in the study will be considered later. However, if one of the key tasks of Academy leaders is to re-energise, inspire and mobilise their staff to accept and be able to deal with the challenges of years of underperformance and everything which accompanies it, there is a critical need for these leaders to invite their staff on this leadership journey in order for any genuine difference and significant improvement to be made. It is this further leadership challenge of getting all involved to take responsibility and accept their role as leaders in moving the organisation forward which can be considered in the following examination of distributed leadership.

2.10   Distributed Leadership

Elmore (2004, p.4) notes how 'standards reform' as part of the school improvement agenda has a 'deceptively simple logic – schools and school systems should be held accountable for their contributions to student learning.' He goes on to argue that part of the failure to deliver sustainable improvements in teaching and learning lies in the fact that increased accountability and restructuring has largely been the route to school improvement. The issue of sustainable leadership will be discussed shortly, however the answer to improving schools seems more to reside in cultural rather than structural change and in the expansion of teacher innovation. The evidence to either prove or disprove this case will be further examined in Chapter 4.

Research shows that effective leaders exert a powerful influence on the success and effectiveness of the school and of the achievement of its students (Wallace, 2002; Waters *et al*., 2004). However there are relatively few studies that have established any direct links between leadership and improved student performance (Hallinger and Heck, 1996). Bell *et al*., (2003) in their systematic review of literature confirm that effective leadership is an important factor in a school's success but, interestingly, that its effect and impact on student learning outcomes was largely indirect. Research by Silns and Mulford (2002) also suggests that student outcomes tend to improve where the sources of leadership are distributed throughout the school and where staff are empowered to take a lead in areas that are important to them.

Leadership, according to Spillane *et al.* (2001, p. 13) is best understood as 'practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation.' This implies a type of social distribution of leadership where the function of leadership is distributed over the work of several individuals, the effect being the interaction of multiple leaders and a systems of interdependency. As Bennett *et al.* (2003, p.3) note 'distributed leadership is not something 'done' by an individual 'to others' … rather it is emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise'. They do, however, point out that there seems to be 'little agreement as to the meaning of the term' (p. 2). Nevertheless in the leadership literature in general, there is a general consensus that it can be reduced to the business of influencing (Leithwood *et al*., 2004).

Distributed leadership is premised upon high levels of 'teacher involvement' and encompasses a wide variety of 'expertise, skill and input' (Harris and Lambert, 2003, p.16). Ensuring that as

many people are involved at the core of leadership activity is the basis of distributed leadership in action. In schools which face total meltdown and disintegration and require something akin to rebirth, such as is the intention with the Academies programme, identifying individuals and introducing such levels of involvement in leadership activity under the considerable pressures to improve all aspects of the organisation in a short time would certainly be a challenge. Distributed leadership involves not only a change in expectation and culture, but a willingness on the part of staff for it to be the welcome responsibility of everyone and an openness for the skills necessary to make it happen to be acquired and developed which, of course, requires effort and a change from the status quo.

As has been discussed previously, the literature on educational reform and school improvement points to the need for transformational approaches to leadership to secure organisational change and future development (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001). If transformational leadership is widely distributed it may further enhance staff involvement in the process of change and enable successful implementation of new ideas to be understood and realised more quickly. The work of Hargreaves (1991), Little (1990; 2000) and Rosenholz (1989) all evidence the fact that distributing leadership to teachers has positive effects on transforming schools but also helps to reduce teacher alienation, something which Novak's work on invitational leadership as discussed previously also highlights. Furthermore, such collaboration and collegiality are at the core of distributed leadership (MacBeath, 1998) whose research shows it to have positive effects upon teachers' self-efficacy and levels of morale. Pellicer *et al.* (1990) found that in the most effective schools, leadership was a shared responsibility of teachers and heads, giving them all a legitimate source of authority.

As a basic starting point by way of check list of observed good practice, the studies of Helm (1989) and Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) note ways in which school leaders open the way for a culture of distributed leadership including:

- distributing the responsibility and power for leadership widely throughout the school

- sharing decision-making power with staff

- allowing staff to manage their own decision-making committees

- taking staff opinion into account

- ensuring effective problem-solving during meetings of staff

- providing autonomy for teachers

- altering working conditions so that staff have collaborative planning time

- ensuring adequate involvement in decision-making related to new initiatives in the school

- creating opportunities for staff development

Whether full scale adoption of distributed leadership is sensible or desirable in the initial stages of leading Academies is open for debate and investigation through the research sections of this work but also its role in the process of sustaining successful outcomes.

2.11 Identification and justification of selection of the key leadership dimensions and characteristics for further consideration through the research sample

From the initial review of literature several key elements have arisen which will be considered further as central in terms of constructing a framework or model for assessing the nature and dimensions for successful leadership of Academies. Amidst the wealth of leadership dimensions, elements and types, it has been necessary to select those which are most substantially plausible in terms of the impact and reference to the issue of leading Academies. Although it could be argued that elements of ethical, emotional, instructional and constructivist leadership also have some role to play in this discussion, on careful consideration and due to the tight focus of the study it has been decided not to include them. However, there is certainly scope to extend the research in that direction with a second major project in future but to justify their significant impact alone in an assessment of leadership of Academies is not substantial for this case.

Arguably, the many dimensions of leadership discussed in this chapter have some role to play in this study. The application of the leadership types through the research findings later will attempt to present the argument contrary to this case. It is clear that the role of both transformational and sustainable leadership as drivers of the model are central to effecting success amidst the challenges and complexities of leading the type of school which is an Academy. The initial literature review has presented a clear indication that, if Academies as schools in the most challenging circumstances with their opportunity to do things differently, freed from their previous control of local authority to move quickly, they need to be far more creative and entrepreneurial to realise the goals. The drivers furthermore which may be

considered as mobilisers or 'engines' for these include aspects of distributed leadership, entrepreneurial leadership and political leadership which, coupled with the strategic leadership gears help to both set and keep the programme for change, improvement and success in motion as shown in the diagrammatic model which follows.
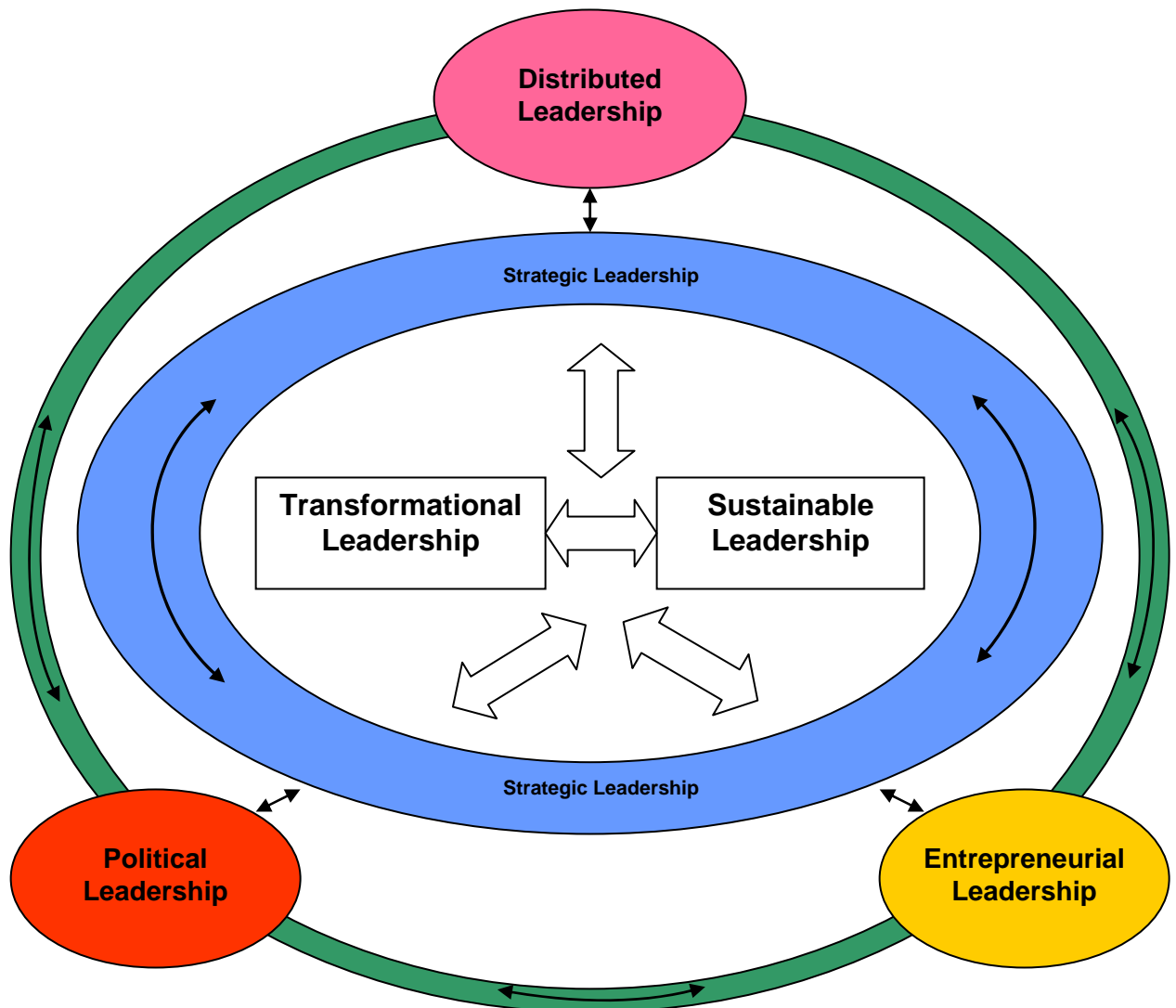
Figure 2.11 Dynamic elements contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

The premise of the model comes from the study of the literature and an identification that **Transformational Leadership** and **Sustainable Leadership** need to be at the absolute core for schools in particularly challenging and complex circumstances to succeed. Whilst it is recognised that all schools are unique, it is also important to consider the similarities in terms of the contexts in which Academies are operating. The model proposes that, although transformation is required to effect change, it cannot occur in isolation from the other leadership elements and that sustainability must be an integral part of each stage of the transformation to ensure step change and stability for the organisation as a whole. Similarly, if working in conjunction with one another, transformational leadership and sustainable leadership require clear vision, direction setting and realignment throughout the journey by way of **Strategic Leadership** whilst at the same time drawing in those aspects of **Political Leadership**, **Distributed Leadership** and **Entrepreneurial Leadership** in various measures and at various times to continue dynamic movement forwards.

The shortcomings of a two dimensional model such as this includes the inability to show the dynamic relationships between the core and its encompassing contributors and also the extent to which each comes into play at the various stages of the leadership journey. However, the emphasis is firmly on the dynamic relationship of the interdependent parts and their role in the process.

Several key questions have arisen from the review of literature on leadership from which this model of dynamic leadership dimensions has been derived and which the research will attempt to explore further, they being:

1. What are the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy?

2. What are the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals?

3. What are the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes?

4. What are the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies?

5. To what degree does leadership autonomy contribute to pace and direction of progress?

6. What are the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies?

Like the model itself which has evolved, guided by the review of literature and initial key questions here, these questions reflect the complex interrelationships at various points in the leadership journey as outlined in this chapter. Although listed individually here to establish clarity of thought at this stage, the challenge and complexity of leadership of schools such as Academies is inextricably linked to the stages of organisational development and change and the type of leadership required at each stage or sub-stage a further important consideration. For example, what also needs to be considered in this complex motion matrix includes: the extent to which aspects of political leadership come into play in executing effective transformational leadership; whether distributed leadership is desirable at the start of a new Academy project or whether its place and contribution is more timely at a later stage; whether the role of entrepreneurial leadership can be balanced against sustaining and embedding best practice and maintaining strategic direction. The complex dynamics of these by way of

example here and the six key questions arising from the initial review of literature listed above will be examined in Chapter 4.

The emphasis beyond that of the theoretical leadership types or styles discussed in this chapter is the real sense of continual movement within and between the 'cogs' and 'gearings' of this model. The analogy of an engine or vehicle is deliberate in that it provides a purposeful visualisation for action, pace, direction and speeds which leaders are faced with in this context. Furthermore, the decision to accelerate or break aligns the reality of this leadership challenges with the theory: if an Academy is to succeed at the pace required coasting out of gear is certainly not an option, nor is a break in the drive belt. The model has evolved as a result of the initial review of literature and the questions in Phase 1 of the research have been developed as a result. In response to the Phase 1 questions and in considering the evolution of the model, Phase 2 questions have been established. The next chapter considers which methodological approaches to researching these key questions on leadership of Academies are most appropriate bearing in mind also the complexity of the nature and context of this level of school leadership and Phase 2 of the interview process by way of refinement and tightening of focus considered to validate the work.

CHAPTER 3   Research Design and Approach

3.1   The Basic Characteristics of Research

The previous literature review chapter has established the six key research elements listed below to be further examined for this study arising from the identified leadership dimensions pertaining to successful leadership of schools facing complexity and challenge. These are:

1. the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;

2. the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;

3. the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;

4. the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;

5. the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;

6. the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

However, in addition the revision of Phase 1 questions following further consideration of the review of literature and creation of the model, the resulting Phase 2 questions serve to provide an even tighter focus on these six elements as listed above. In an attempt to provide concrete answers to them they recognise the progression and focus which this study has taken as it has moved forward. With specific reference to the dimensions of the model and linked to the six elements above, the key components are highlighted for specific attention as follows:

1. Why did you apply for the post of Principal of this Academy? Why an Academy? (look for opportunities to do things differently, commitment to combating social inequality etc)

2. What **leadership challenges** (both internal and external) has this Academy presented you with?

3. What are the key aspects which you had to **transform** and how did you go about doing this?

4. How did you go about identifying, introducing and **sustaining** the culture, ethos and direction of this Academy?

5. To what extent were staff prepared to take a lead … and who did you introduce/develop this … and what have been the outcomes? (**distributed leadership**)

6. Do you feel there is a **type of leader** required for an Academy (i.e. are there key **leadership styles**, skills and competencies which are essential/beneficial/desirable?)

7. What is different about the challenges Principals of Academies are faced with compared with other schools (e.g. Maintained schools)? (look for **political**, **entrepreneurial**…..)

8. What would you describe are the challenges for you in terms of your **strategic/operational/technical** role as Academy Principal?

9. To what extent do you feel you have leadership **autonomy** (and what effect does this have on the Academy and the way you lead)?

10. What, from your experience and insight, do you see are the longer term leadership skills and requirements (3-5 years) for this Academy? (**sustainability**)

11. How will you go about developing and **sustaining** the direction and focus of your leadership over the next 3 - 5 years?

12. What do the sponsors bring to the Academy and what aspects of your relationship with governors/sponsors have developed or emerged during your time as Principal to date?

This chapter focuses on a consideration of the most appropriate methodology for investigating the key elements arising from the initial thesis, subsequent review of literature model and six key elements. However, it is also important to note that, in establishing the model from the initial review of literature and in testing it through Phase 1 interviews, a further refinement and tighter focus in this iterative process must be considered to validate the study.

The fundamental challenges in research, outlined by Pring (2000, p.58), are of observing the 'reality and objectivity' of the process when determining 'explanations of human behaviour'. This chapter explores the different methodologies available to undertake a systematic enquiry. Verma and Mallick (1999, p.13) suggest that research is:

'A process which consists of a series of linked activities which has a beginning and an end … it is essentially an intellectual and creative activity.'

Mouly (1978, p. 12) states that:

> 'Research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data.'

It is important to understand the purpose and approach taken in the research activity. Bassey (1999, p.38) states that:

> 'Research is systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry, which aims to contribute towards the advancement of knowledge and wisdom.'

Key words occur in all of these statements; two use the term 'systematic', which implies that there needs to be a sense of order and structure to the process. The research needs to be planned in terms of design, process and outcomes. Bassey's terms 'critical' and 'self-critical' are important, as it assumes that the research design and methodology should be open to reflection and this links to Mouly's notion that research should be 'dependable'. Data are not automatically transformed into knowledge; information is organised into data by the process of coding and analysis. It is therefore surprising that only Mouly (1978) suggests that the process involves analysis and interpretation. However, Morrison (2002) implies these concepts when suggesting that research is 'investigated'. This involves data being broken down into smaller parts and the relationship between those parts discussed. Morrison's definition also includes the importance of a systematic process, and helpfully identifies that there are tow aspects of the process which need consideration. This helps to define the two parts of this

chapter: first to explain the research approach and second, to discuss the practical application of that approach.

> 'A systematic inquiry that is both a distinctive way of thinking about educational phenomena, that is, an attitude, and of investigating them, that is, an action or activity.' (Morrison, 2002, p.3).

This chapter describes the systematic process of this research, the approach or attitude of the research and the consequent actions and undertakings of those activities. It could be concluded that the research study should be a systematic process, which involves an approach with certain activities or actions, which may provide new information or ideas for the researcher or those involved in the study or for a wider audience.

3.2   Classification of Research

Research has been classified in various ways: by method, by field of academic discipline, by the type of data collection process or by purpose. Verma and Mallick (1999, p.10-11) suggest a taxonomy of types of research which

> 'has the advantage of highlighting some critical differences between research that is oriented to the development of theory and that is designed to deal with practical problems.'

Their classifications are:

- pure or basic research;

- action research;

- evaluation research;

- applied research;

- field research.

However, there are problems even with this basic classification. For example action research and evaluative research may also be field research. It is problematical to define aspects of research in such a mutually exclusive way. This has been a difficulty in writing this chapter as there are no clear understandings or definitions. Research approaches are complementary, they overlap and interweave; just as research tools can be applicable to different methodologies. It has been established that this research is an investigation, examination and analysis of the nature and dimensions for successful leadership of Academies in relation to the level of challenge and complexity posed by the role. The nature of the thesis demands research in the field with Academy Principals, in real environments and not in a controlled environment. Pure research is usually accepted as the development of theories by discovering broad generalisations or principles (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1994). This type of research is usually carried out in a laboratory-controlled environment, which implies that control and precision are important, and it is intended to lead to theoretical developments. This research focuses on the practical implications and application of leadership in an Academy context.

Action research is more concerned with the application of theory rather than its development but it 'requires researcher to make changes to practice and to evaluate and write up the outcomes of this activity' (Swann, 2003, p. 29), thus requiring the researcher's involvement in the action process. It focuses on a particular problem in a specific setting, with the aim to implement a change in a particular situation, which is not the purpose of this study. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.9) state that the aim for action research 'is to transform the social environment through a process of critical enquiry'. The aim of this research is to investigate leadership in a range of different Academy settings and therefore basic action research is not appropriate to this investigation.

Evaluation research is used to monitor the effectiveness of a particular programme or innovation. The term 'evaluation research' is often used to refer to the systematic procedures which are adopted over a period of time to collect and process data concerning the effectiveness of a set of events (Verma and Malick, 1999). This approach is not appropriate for this study, which aims to consider various leadership dimensions and challenges faced by Academy Principals, in the first three years of their leadership of the Academy and between different Academies.

Field research is concerned with 'the application of new knowledge for the solution of day-to-day problems' (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p.11). The purpose of field research is to improve a process by investigating theoretical constructs in actual situations. These approaches are relevant to this study, which aims to explore the practical realisation and application of much of the theoretical literature on leadership of schools in challenging circumstances.

3.3 The Philosophy of the Research

Swann and Pratt (2003, p. 3) suggest that 'what people do in the name of research is influenced by assumptions about knowledge'. The philosophy of Karl Popper is useful here although his main orientation was towards quantitative research in the 1960's. Swann (2003, p.14) identifies the key features of Popper's epistemology such as:

- we inhabit a reality, which we can attempt to understand;

- the outcomes of these attempts are conjectural;

- in order to become better able to understand and manipulate reality we need to utilize the correspondence theory of truth. The idea is that a statement is true only if it corresponds to the facts.

- The pursuit of truth can be distinguished from the pursuit of certainty.

In accepting this view, the conclusions from the study must not go beyond the evidence. Popper's argument within his quantitative paradigm that good theory has to be empirically 'falsifiable' challenges this through the reference to 'facts'. Some qualitative researchers would argue that there are no facts, just subjective perceptions and interpretations but even though this study appears to lend itself to a broadly qualitative approach the challenge of what constitutes 'fact' needs to be borne in mind. Therefore, it may be possible to establish a model for leadership of Academies, which could be useful for others but any models could be inaccurate in the future.

Verma and Mallick's concept that truth making in the research process is essentially naïve, believing that there is 'a multiplicity of truths, all of which have legitimacy and are dependent on the positioning of each actor in the research context' further challenges Popper's notion whilst at the same time challenging the research here to consider what 'fact' and 'truth' are in establishing a methodological approach to the study. This idea seems to have value; if meanings are socially constructed, then different interpretations may be valid depending on the researcher's perceptions. It is important therefore that 'any claims to know must be justified on the basis of how the claim was arrived at' (Scott and Usher, 1999, p.11).

In approaching social reality, Cohen and Manion (1994, p.6) suggest we make 'ontological assumptions and epistemological assumptions'. Scott and Usher (1999) suggest that methods are embedded in commitments of particular versions of the world (an ontology) and ways of knowing that world (an epistemology). Assumptions of an ontological kind are

> 'assumptions which concern the very nature or essence or the social phenomena being investigated' (Cohen and Manion 1994, p.6).

'Objectivism is an ontological position that implies that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors' (Bryman, 2001, p.17). This argument implies that social phenomena have an existence, which is separate from the people. In contrast constructionism considers that social constructions are built up form the perceptions and actions of the people in that context. Assumptions which are epistemological determine, according to Cohen and Manion (1994, p.6):

'whether knowledge is something which can be acquired on one hand or is something which has to be personally experienced on the other.'

It is important to base the choice of research approach on a best fit, so, functionally, choosing the best approach. If the data required are objective and tangible (Cohen and Manion, 1994) then objective methods of natural science, a positivist approach, will be used. On the other hand if the research questions require personal, subjective and unique knowledge (Cohen and Manion, 1994) an anti-positivist approach will be the best choice. It seems that even this first step in identifying the methodology raises more possible issues to be debated than clear-cut answers. Given the immense literature on every aspect of the methodology debate, it is important to take a route through this methodology minefield which is both achievable, given the available time and resources, and will provide a 'goodness-of-fit' to the research approach. Even at this stage it is important to note that taking a quantitative approach would focus on, for example, how many Academy Principals hold particular views about the role of governance of Academies, but this is not important for this study. Rather, the interest is upon the different or similar views of Principals, their explanations and understanding of the key elements of the thesis, which would suggest a qualitative approach to the research. The research approach for this study will be discussed next.

3.4   The Research Approach for this Thesis

Most research texts seem to divide approaches to research into two paradigms, qualitative and quantitative and have different philosophical (ontological, epistemological and methodological) assumptions. This is suggested in order to make research methodology easier

to understand, but the notion of two mutually exclusive categories appears to be misleading. In practice it seems as if there are not distinct quantitative or qualitative methodologies. Techniques described by authors as belonging to one paradigm can be used by researchers operating within the other paradigm. Thus the writing of this chapter was not straightforward, because research in practice does not fit with tightly defined characteristics. It was not possible to follow a linear, logical pathway. Swann and Pratt (2003, p. 4) suggest that:

> 'the practice of labelling approaches according to various 'isms' can be a useful
>
> way of conveying information about what a person believes and does … but the
>
> trouble with the positivism / interpretivism dichotomy is that it excludes many
>
> approaches adopted by researchers.'

This view was helpful in determining a way forward. For example many texts seem to ignore the constraints of time and the limited resources experienced in this study, which may result in working between the two traditional paradigms. Even the terms used for these accepted ways of theorizing social reality are not consistent, for example:

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991)	Positivism	Phenomenology
Bryman (2001)	Deduction	Induction
Gill and Johnson (1997)	Nomothetic	Ideographic
Scott and Usher (1999)	Quantitative	Qualitative
Morrison (2002)	Positivism	Interpretivism

Figure 3.4 : Terms used to theorise social reality

The methodology for this research needs to ensure that we understand what the Principals believe is happening in their Academies with regard to the context, challenges, skills sets and

prerequisites for successful leadership and its measurable outcomes. As already suggested, Scott and Usher (1999, p. 10) identify two approaches; 'quantitative' and 'qualitative', as representing the traditional divide in discussions about research methods. Bryman (2001, p. 9) uses the terms 'deduction and induction'; while Morrison (2002, p. 23) suggests that the philosophical tradition that determines these two approaches are, respectively, 'positivism' and 'interpretivism'. This division reflects the underlying paradigm or view adopted by the researcher, which influences the approach to the research, to the method of data collection and the analysis. The terms, 'quantitative' and 'qualitative', are not just labels for different research methods but imply a different outlook or concept of the nature of the enquiry, as Bryman (1988, p.3) identifies:

'Increasingly the terms quantitative research and qualitative research came to signify much more than ways of gathering data; they came to denote divergent assumptions about the nature and purpose of research in the social sciences.'

Each will be discussed in relation to the research and context of the thesis.

3.4a   Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is concerned with gaining and interpreting data, which can be 'presented in the form of discrete units that can be compared with other units by using statistical techniques' (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p.26). It refers therefore to any approach where the aim is to gather information which can be quantified. Morrison (2002) suggests that

quantitative research is a rational, linear process. Quantitative research has a number of key elements. The relationship between concept formation, observation and measurement is central, as Bryman (1988, p. 18) indicates:

'quantitative research is often conceptualized … as having a structure in which theories determine the problems … data is collected by social survey or experiment … they are then analysed so the causal connection specified by the hypothesis can be verified or rejected.'

Scanlon (2000, p. 7) defines quantitative research as 'highly structured and produces data which are amenable to statistical analysis'. The results of quantitative research are presented in the form of descriptive or inferential statistics, such as tests of significance or correlation analysis; it is concerned with presenting findings in numerical form. Scanlon (2000, p. 7) claims that 'until the 1960s quantitative methods dominated social research … focusing on the need for objective, quantifiable information'. This form of research takes into account the differences between people at the group level, only looking at general trends for a large number of people (nomothetic). Qualitative research looks at the individual level (ideographic). The deductive process, where the structure is defined from the beginning, appears therefore to be very linear, one step following the other in a logical sequence, but as expected, this again is not necessarily as clear cut as this; Bryman (2001, p. 10) indicates that:

'there are many instances where this isn't the case: a researcher's view may have changed as a result of the analysis of collected data or the relevance of data may be become apparent after the data have been collected.'

Even given these confusions and indeed elements of overlap, it is generally accepted that quantitative approaches start with a theory and necessitates a scientific approach to observations in order to produce findings. Whereas, Bryman (2001, p. 10) suggests that a qualitative approach not only has a different view to knowledge but reverses this process, and 'starts with observations in order to use the findings to reach the outcome of a theory'.

This study starts with theoretical ideas. Through the literature review a starting point of elements to be considered has been achieved, built on and developed through the consideration of practice. Kerlinger, as reported by Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 19) suggests that hypotheses can be deduced from theory and 'play a crucial part in the scientific method'. This seems a somewhat obvious and basic statement but is nevertheless included to underpin the basis of the thesis which starts with theoretical ideas through the literature review and, furthermore, that qualitative researchers Miles and Humerman accept and state the necessity for *a priori* conceptual framework. If this research were investigating a created hypothesis, the conclusion at this stage is that the research would be quantitative in approach. But this research does not aim to test out preformed ideas, to prove a theory. It seeks to investigate the elements from the literature review through lived experience, exploring through the voices of respondents how the ideas are constructed in reality, to understand the reality. Whilst the starting point is ideas and a theoretical knowledge the aim is to establish a model based on the lived experiences. It is therefore appropriate to use qualitative techniques. It would be unrealistic to believe that could this study could be approached with no knowledge and thus develop a theory from pure observation. Maybe Bryman's view (2001, p. 10) is too simplistic a view of a qualitative approach which will be considered next.

3.4b   Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach has 'an overarching view that all human life is experienced and constructed from a subjective perspective' (Morrison, 2002, p. 19). For an interpretivist, then, there cannot be an objective reality existing without the meanings people bring to it. The starting point for qualitative researchers, Morrison (2002, p. 18) suggests, is 'to conduct educational research with people'. From a qualitative researcher's view, social research can only be a human interaction. This view is supported by Verma and Mallick (1999, p. 27):

> 'The main feature of qualitative research methods is that meaningful explanations of social activities require a substantial appreciation of the perspectives … of the actors involved.'

A qualitative approach therefore involves gathering evidence which reflects the experiences, feelings or judgements of participants in the research study. A qualitative approach takes the people being studied as central and is based upon the philosophical tradition of interpretivism. 'Meaningful explanations' need full descriptions, and a process of empathy and understanding through an investigation from the inside. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 6) suggest that qualitative research is 'conducted through an intense and /or prolonged contact with a … life situation'. Cresswell (1998, p. 15) defines qualitative research as:

> 'an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry, that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting.'

This research will not be 'an extended contact' with the participants. However, the techniques required need do involve the reflection of the feelings and the views of the individuals concerned. Having discussed the differences of these two approaches it is necessary to consider which is the most appropriate choice for this research.

3.4c   A Qualitative or Quantitative Approach?

Robson (1994) notes that quantitative research, which is also referred to as positivistic, natural-science based, hypothetico-deductive, and 'scientific', is typically seen as involving approaches to data collection such as experiments and surveys. He also identifies that qualitative research, which is labelled interpretive and ethnographic, is typified as involving case studies, observation and interview. The difference between qualitative and quantitave research is not just that they employ different ways of collecting data it is also, crucially, that they have different ways of collecting different data.

Bryman (2001), in summarising the debate about the extent to which one can legitimately combine quantitative and qualitative research , identifies two different ways of viewing them. The first position sees the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research as relating to different ways of collecting data and claims that one needs to choose the best method on the basis of the technical constraints of each. The alternative stance is that quantitative and qualitative research represent incompatible views on how the social world should be studied:

> 'they are viewed as competing views about the ways in which social reality ought to be studied, and as such they are essentially divergent clusters of epistemological

assumptions, that is, of what should pass as warrantable knowledge about the social world' (Bryman, 2001, p.5).

Thus, at one extreme there are researchers who argue that one can mix and match between quantitative and qualitative research (e.g. Tesch, 1990). At the other extreme are those who argue that quantitative and qualitative research, because of their different underpinning assumptions about ontology and epistemology, represent distinct and incompatible paradigms (e.g. Scott and Usher, 1999). In the middle are researchers, such as Hammersley (1992), who dispute the significance of the differences between the philosophical underpinnings of quantitative and qualitative research and thus argue that they are not mutually exclusive, and others, such as Willis, Thompson and Sadera (1999), who whilst appearing to acknowledge paradigmatic incompatibilities, still argue that we should attend to research from all paradigms.

Examination of this debate suggests that one could consider research at a number of different levels. For example, Strauss and Corbin (1998) distinguish between Methodology and Methods, whilst Scott and Usher (1999) differentiate between ontology, epistemology, strategy and methods (see Table 3.4c for a comparison of these two classifications). Both of these classifications distinguish between philosophical and technical levels at which one can consider research.

Strauss and Corbin (1998)	Scott and Usher (1999)
Methodology: a way of thinking about and studying social reality	**Ontology**: the nature of the world – how it is.
	Epistemology: how we know the world – views of knowledge.
Methods: a set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analysing data.	**Strategy**: research design using certain types of reasoning.
	Method: techniques for collecting and analysing data

Table 3.4c: Different 'levels' at which one can consider research

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 8) state:

'The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.'

It seems, following substantial consideration of the elements above and bearing in mind the initial thesis proposed for investigation, a simple choice. However only by considering the options has this decision been reached. This research looks to personal, subjective and unique knowledge in the form of the opinions of Academy Principals' and will therefore be qualitative. The purpose of the extensive discussion of possible research methodologies has served to consider what processes and procedures within each may best lend themselves to the investigation and the extent to which they can be operationalised. But is it this simple? Pring

(2000, p. 43) helpfully suggests, while denying the apparent divide between ontological and epistemological differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches:

> 'the world of real life or the world of common sense … cannot be captured by either one or the other, and indeed there must be an integration and overlapping of the two.'

He suggests (p. 47) that:

> 'there are many distinctions to be made within the qualitative tradition, each with its distinctive way of engaging in enquiry and of making intelligible the personal and social reality which is being portrayed.'

It is this discussion and indeed evaluation of the layers of qualitative methodology which has contributed to the selection and focus of the appropriate methodologies for this investigation.

Positivist understandings of strategic theory have suggested ideas to be explored through interpretative methods. Whilst the literature is to a greater extent 'theoretical' it does not necessarily follow that all the theories have been reached by a positivist empirical approach. Indeed some are the outcomes of qualitative research and others have been conjectured without any empirical observation. It is this variety which further contributes to the complexity in moving to the next stage of research investigation. Given the nature of the world

that is the subject of this research, that of Academy Principals, it must be recognized that the subject matter is experience and that the researcher's interest is how meaning is constructed. Scott and Usher (1999, p. 25) state 'human action is inseparable from meaning, and experiences are classified and ordered through interpretative frames'. Situations need to be interpreted in order to look at the constructed nature of reality. Positivist techniques would not help me to understand the complexity of this reality. The aim of this research is to provide an interpretation of human actions and practices within the contexts of different Academies with specific focus on their leaders; interpretative techniques are therefore required. This study needs to consider the perceptions of Principals. Their understandings and interpretations are important. Specifically my research aims to answer the question: What are the particular challenges and complexities specific to leading an Academy through the consideration of the six elements identified through the initial review of literature:

- the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;

- the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;

- the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;

- the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;

- the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;

- the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

Swann (2003, p. 29) suggests that 'what' questions indicate a theoretical problem and 'how' questions indicate practical problems. She suggests that identifying what sort of problem is under investigation will help to determine which approach is needed. Maybe this highlights

part of the problem of this particular research, given that it involves both theoretical considerations and practical implications. However, all the questions rely on interpretation and the research methods need to allow for emergent data. This exploration and comparison of the quantitative-qualitative debate has helped clarify the research methodologies that would be appropriate for this study. The varieties of methods available in a qualitative research tradition will now be examined.

3.5   Varieties of Qualitative Research

Denscombe (1998, p. 3) considers that 'the social researcher is faced with a variety of options and alternatives and has to make strategic decisions about which to choose.' Each choice is based on assumptions about the world investigated. He suggests that some strategies are better suited than others for tackling specific issues and goes on to suggest that the 'crucial thing for good research is that the choices are reasonable and that they are made explicit' (Denscombe 1998, p. 3). The strategic approach chosen will relate to the scope and the scale of the investigation. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) classify qualitative research in three ways: by the investigation of lived experience; by the investigation of society and culture; or by the investigation of language and communication. It has already been established that this study is involved with the investigation of lived experience, that is the reality of performing the role in a day to day real time context. They suggest that four research traditions are appropriate, but discussion of all of these would be outside the scope of this study, most requiring anthropological knowledge. However, it is important to identify which qualitative method is the best approach for this study.   Cresswell (1998) identifies five traditions of enquiry within

a qualitative approach, each having its own strengths and weaknesses: biography; phenomenology; grounded theory; ethnography and case study.

3.5a Biography involves an individual's life experiences which form their perspective.

This is sometimes labelled life history. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 539) describe biography as 'a commentary of the individual's very personal view of his own experience as he understands it'. Although life history has relevance, in that some of the experiences will be part of a life story, as a method to be followed it is not the best approach for this study.

3.5b Phenomenology involves the study of reality as it appears to individuals.

This is derived from a philosophical tradition which seeks to describe the meaning of lived experiences of a group of people in relation to a concept or phenomenon, the expected outcome will be a description of the 'essence of the experience' (Cresswell, 1998, p. 150). Phenomenology, as an approach, seeks to describe how the individual experiences the phenomena, attempts to see things from the person's point of view. It addresses a question about meaning, 'What is the experience of…?'. This should certainly be considered as an appropriate approach to this study.

3.5c Grounded Theory is derived from a sociological perspective and seeks to explain the social realities by identifying the processes at work in the situation being investigated. It examines in depth the attitudes, beliefs and practices of the subject under study as they occur in every day life. Questions of interaction and process, 'How does one become a … ?' are the

focus for grounded theory. Denscombe (1998, p. 217) identifies the key features of grounded theory as:

- Empirical field research as starting point

- Analysis based around fieldwork observations

- Explanations which are relevant to the respondents in the research

- Adopts an emergent design where the samples and focus of the research

- develop during the course of the research.

At its basic level this could be an appropriate approach. However, there is a clear focus to this research and an identified sample in mind, it being 12 Principals of the 27 Academies currently open at the time of conducting the research. This approach therefore is not the most appropriate for this study.

3.5d An Ethnography is a 'description and interpretation of a cultural group or system' (Creswell, 1998, p. 58). The researcher therefore examines the patterns of behaviour, customs or way of life of a group of people. As a process this involves prolonged observation of the group, where the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people. This particular research does require elements of the specific study of meanings of behaviour or language but not in the same way as in Ethnography.

3.5e Case Study involves the exploration of a bounded system. Denscombe (1998, p. 30) suggests that 'the defining characteristic of case study is its focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated.' This would suggest that case study is not an appropriate

approach since a number of instances are being used. However, Middlewood, Coleman and Lumby (1999, p. 57) determine that case study is concerned with 'a real happening in an institution' and where individual perceptions could be 'used to build up a picture', and this would make case study an appropriate approach. Bell (1987, p. 6) states that 'the case study approach is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale'. Case study focuses on the interaction of factors and events, and it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific situation and identify any interactive processes at work. The aim is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular, and therefore would be an appropriate approach for this research, with a number of cases being considered in depth.

Denscombe (1998, p. 31) further defines case study as 'focusing on relationships and processes' which, although not explicit could also be argued to involve interpersonal and/or physical causal relationships. This study needs to discover how the parts affect one another and, therefore, case study would be an appropriate strategy. One of the strengths of case study is that it allows the use of a variety of sources, types of data and research tools as part of the investigation and it therefore has the potential to deal with the intricacies of complex social situations. Bassey (2003, p. 117) defines the 'concept of *educational case study* as an empirical enquiry which is conducted:

- *within* a localized boundary of space and time;
- into *interesting* aspects of an educational activity … or system;
- in order to inform the judgments of practitioners … or theoreticians;

- in such a way that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able to:

  ⇒ explore *significant* features;

  ⇒ create *plausible* interpretations of what is found;

  ⇒ test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations;

  ⇒ construct a *worthwhile* argument;

  ⇒ relate the argument to any relevant research in the literature;

  ⇒ convey *convincingly* to an audience this argument or story, and

  ⇒ provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments.'

The terms in the above quotation in italics inevitably entail value judgements being made by the researcher. For Bassey, the use of the term 'educational case study…' places this definition in the field of educational research (including educational management and leadership research), as opposed to discipline research in educational settings. Bassey defines educational research then as critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action, whereas discipline research in education is seen by Bassey as critical enquiry aimed at informing understanding of phenomenon (in educational settings) which are pertinent to the discipline. For Bassey, educational case study research is more concerned with improving action through theoretical understanding, and discipline research (which includes psychology, sociology, history, economic, philosophy etc.) with increasing theoretical knowledge of the discipline. The boundary between them is not clear cut. Case study is arduous and demanding of both researchers and researched and it is

important therefore that it should not be wasted on trivial pursuits but should aim to contribute to some aspects of what happens in the widest sense. The researcher needs to collect sufficient data to allow exploration of features, create interpretations and test for 'trustworthiness' and this entails exercise considerable insight and judgement. It would appear that this approach is well suited to this research study.

3.5f   The Rationale for Case Study

By their very nature, biography, ethnography and grounded theory are not considered appropriate methodologies for this study. Case study through interview and phenomenology are the methodologies which are most appropriate, as they focus, in a broad sense, on the comprehension of meaning in text or action. However virtually all of the qualitative approaches seek this in one way or another, for example text (written language) and spoken language may not be the same at a detailed level and the extent to which context is considered and analysed and should be borne in mind. In deciding on this research approach the perspective of Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1984, p. 16) provide a useful support for the use of case study, as they consider case study has at its heart 'the decision to focus on enquiry around an instance'. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 7) suggest that phenomenology is concerned with 'discerning themes' whereas case study is concerned with 'interpretation'. In practice there is very little difference between these and it is difficult to provide evidence sufficient to maintain this distinction to which they lay claim. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 8) claim that phenomenologists 'do not use coding, but assume that through continued readings … one can capture the essence of an account.' However this may not be totally true since some make use of formal coding and all may use some form of coding or categorisation.

It is therefore a question of degree rather than an either or decision as to how and where it should be used in this instance. Since the approach to analysis is part of the decision taken in the method chosen, and coding is a tool which would be useful to interpret the data, phenomenology, as defined as lived experiences which are central to this thesis should certainly be considered as one of the approaches. Therefore case study through interview is an appropriate perspective to take.

In considering the dimensions of a case study approach, Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 123) highlight it as having the advantage of being 'strong in reality' and recognises the 'complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths'. The case in this study focuses on Principals of Academies. The limitation of case study is, as Verma and Mallick (1999) and Denscombe (1998) state, the credibility of generalizations made from the findings, but how to define generalisability is debatable. For example, Bassey (1981, p. 6) states:

> 'an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision-making to that described in the case study.'

Thus while it may not be directly transferable, the study may hold insights for other researchers or practitioners.

3.5g   Interviews: types and planning stages

The research interview has been defined by Cannel and Khan (cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, p. 271) as ' a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focussed by him [her] on content specified by research objective of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.'

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, pp. 284 – 285) a possible sequence of stages in interviews could be: deciding the purpose of the study; translating the general goal into more detailed objectives; translating the objectives into interview questions; choosing a question format and response mode; setting up and conducting the interview; coding and scoring; analysing and interpreting. A similar sequence is offered by Kvale (1996, p. 88). For his slightly different and more analytical guidance, see Powney and Watts (1997, p. 88). It is therefore logical that, after the main purpose of this study was established, it was then subdivided into specific elements or objectives arising from the review of literature for specific focus upon through the interview stage of the research. However, it was necessary to further refine and create a tighter focus in Phase 2 of the interviews and the resulting questions (see Appendix B ii) serve to validate the model which was drawn from the initial review of literature and upon which Phase 1 of the research interviews were conducted.

Choosing interviewees is discussed by Kvale (1996, pp.101-102) whose proposal is that of choosing as many as the research really needs to obtain necessary information: he also indicates that the suggestion, 'the more interviews, the more scientific' is inappropriate. In this case it is necessary to interview a representative cross sample of the serving Academy

Principals in the 27 open Academies which had been operating for at least three years. The cross sample selection being comprised of background prior to their leadership of an Academy, gender, age and geographical location. This sample was selected to mirror as close a representative cross sample of comparable aspects of other types of publicly funded local authority maintained secondary schools and their leadership operating in challenging urban contexts at the time of writing.

At this point it may be helpful to justify the choice of interview style and question format before proceeding to an overview of the reasons behind choosing the defined methodologies for this study.

Interviews range from the formal interview where pre-formed questions are asked in a strict order and responses recorded on a standard schedule, through less formal ones in which the interviewer is free to modify the sequence of questions, explain them or add to them, to the completely informal and unstructured interview where the interviewer may have a number of key issues which are raised in a conversational style. More specifically, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 273) mention four types of interview: the structured interview, the unstructured interview, the non-directive interview and the focused interview. Breakwell (1990, pp. 78-79) suggests that structured interviews involve a fixed set of questions asked in a fixed order and often with a fixed – alternative response mode; although such interviews are easy to code and analyse, they offer no space for the interviewee's insights. On the other hand, unstructured interviews take place when the respondent is the one who defines the importance and order of the topics constituting the main area of interest of the interviewer. Denzin and

Lincoln (2005), provide broader information on this aspect. As one might expect, analysis of such interviews is particularly difficult and time consuming. Between these two there is the solution offered by semi-structured interviews which combines the advantages of the two ends of the continuum.

The style and method referred to as 'leadership voices' developed and used extensively by Davies, Davies and Ellison (1995); Davies (2006) encourages respondent to develop freely their views and feelings around the topic but within a specific question framework with a clear focus. The interviewer therefore serves to intervene only to clarify certain issues or move the conversation towards the next key topic areas which the interviewer has pre-prepared. This creates a feeling of dialogue in these periods of interviewer intervention rather than direct imposition.

Here it would be useful to offer a distinction of the types of questions used in interviews. Interviews can thus employ 'fixed-alternative' items such as yes-no or open-ended questions. Although the former can be an item, the open-ended item is by far the most common. Furthermore there could also be multiple choice items (this could be a fixed-alternative item) for example in collecting demographic data such as levels of educational attainment at A level, GCSE and so on. Open-ended questions are flexible (Millar, Crute and Hargie, 1992, p.110) and enable the interviewer to clear up misunderstandings, to establish co-operations and rapport and allow the interviewer to 'make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p. 227). Concerning question format, it seems most suitable that interviews for this study would be most usefully in structured open-ended

format. Furthermore, the interviewer should aim at assessing the respondent's perceptions and feelings in each case in the analysis of subsequent transcriptions.

3.6   Research Authenticity

Having chosen the most appropriate approach, that of case study through interview, it is important to consider whether this approach is trustworthy. Bush (2002, p. 59) asserts that 'validity, reliability and triangulation are all important and complex terms whose meaning and salience varies according to the stance of the researcher'. Bell (1987) states that whatever procedures are used they should always be examined critically to assess to the extent that they are likely to be reliable and valid. It is important to defend the approaches taken in this study to ensure that the research will stand up to external scrutiny. Each will be discussed in turn and in addition the ethical dimensions of the study will be considered. Bush (2002, p. 59) suggests that these concepts 'were originally developed for use in positivist, or quantitative, research' but Aspinwall *et al.* (1994, p. 218) suggest that the concepts apply to interpretative research too:

> 'Is it reliable? … This is a tricky area. Quantitative indicators are often more reliable than more qualitative ones. Their reliability can be bought at the expense of their validity.'

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1994, p. 40) recognise the reservations of some writers in applying these concepts to interpretative research, but they defend the value for all researchers:

'Provided the researcher is committed to providing a faithful description of others' understandings and perceptions, then ideas such as validity and reliability can provide a very useful discipline.'

Authenticity seems an intangible goal. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 415) state 'validity represents the always out of reach'. Bush (2002, p. 71) says that 'while there is no perfect truth, a focus on reliability, validity and triangulation should contribute to an acceptable level of authenticity'. It has already been established that the pursuit of truth is different from the pursuit of certainty. However, these concepts will be discussed next.

3.6a Reliability

The criterion for reliability is usually taken to be, as Denscombe (1998, p. 213) states, whether 'the research instruments are neutral in their effect' and whether they would 'measure the same result if used on different occasions'. So a research instrument is said to be reliable if it is consistent; if it can be replicated. Bush (2002, p. 60) supports this view, but identifies it may not be as definitive as Denscombe suggests:

'Reliability relates to the probability that repeating a research procedure method would produce identical or similar results.'

Bush suggests that there is a 'probability' factor and that results may be 'similar' not necessarily 'identical'. This is particularly helpful when considering qualitative research. Qualitative research cannot be entirely reproducible because with people all sorts of variables effect the situation; behaviour can be affected by for example, hunger, what sort of day they

have had, or their emotional state. All of these states could affect their response to the research instrument. In addition, the researcher is an integral part of the qualitative research instrument. Consequently the issue of reliability is broadened and we have to consider whether the same results would be achieved if someone else did the research. Cryer (2000, p. 75) describes external reliability when he states that 'where different researchers can repeat a piece of research and obtain precisely the same results the research is said to be entirely reliable'.

It could be that reliability has a different function in qualitative research, from that in quantitative research, and could apply to qualitative research in principle, to minimise error and bias or to be trustworthy. Bassey (1999, p. 75) proposes this notion of trustworthiness: 'this successfully illuminates the ethic of respect for truth in case study research'. Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 72) argue that 'for reliability to be calculated it is incumbent on the scientific investigator to document his or her procedure'. Yin (1994, p. 146) suggests that:

> 'the general way of approaching the reliability problem is to conduct research
>
> as if someone were looking over your shoulder.'

In this study the reader will be able to judge reliability because the key decisions are identified and discussed in relation to the sample and how the research was undertaken. The key aspect of this study is whether there is dependability in the interview process and in the coding process. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 21) prefer the term 'credibility' when applied to qualitative research. This chapter aims to demonstrate that this research is trustworthy.

Bell (1987, p. 51) describes the links between reliability and validity:

> 'Validity tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe. If an item is unreliable, then it must also lack validity, but a reliable item is not necessarily also valid. It could produce the same or similar responses on all occasions, but not be measuring what it is supposed to be measure.'

This is true for quantitative data but in the case of qualitative interviews the data could be valid, or credible, they could be accurate but not necessarily reliable or trustworthy, in that the person could change his or her mind. The notion of validity will be discussed next.

3.6b Validity

Bush (2002, p. 65) suggests that:

> 'the concept of validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon, which it is intended to describe.'

Cryer (2000, p. 76) supports this view. 'Where a piece of research does what it is intended to do, it is said to be valid'. This could apply to the whole process: the research design, the methodology and any conclusions reached will need to be valid.

Denzin and Lincoln advocate, like Bassey (1999) a preference for trustworthiness:

> 'The traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity are replaced
>
> by such terms as trustworthiness and authenticity.'
>
> (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 158)

Validity is to do with the data and the methods being right, and whether the data reflect the truth and cover fundamental elements. In the positivist tradition, internal validity is whether the researchers are observing what they think they are observing and external validity is whether the findings are applicable to other groups. For the interpretivist tradition these notions are replaced by credibility and applicability.

The most practical method of achieving greater credibility, according to Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 282) is 'to minimise the amount of bias'. In interviews this could be caused through the characteristics of the interviewer, the respondents and the content of the questions. Potential misconceptions of the respondent were reduced through the process of trialling the interview questions, and through sending the transcript of the interview to the respondents for them to check for errors or misconceptions and to check that it 'accorded with their feelings and behaviours' (Denscombe, 1998, p. 214). In the analysis, alternative possibilities were explored. A lack of bias by the interviewer using semi-structured interviews is harder to verify.

External validity or applicability is also difficult since the researcher was unable to generalise from this set of interviews to other similar individuals because of the fundamental subjectivity

of qualitative data. Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1984, p. 95) suggests that the 'description of the case will increasingly emphasise its uniqueness'. However, the purpose of the investigation is to look at the characteristics of Academy leadership, and while the results may not be generalise-able or even representative of the whole population of Academy Principals, the chosen participants will give an insight into the prerequisites, skills and challenges required to lead this new and specific type of school, and the readers can evaluate how much this is applicable to them. It may be that generalisation may become less ambiguous because several similar interviews are undertaken. The process is replicated in similar settings. Furthermore, the use of a Phase 2 set of interviews, refining and tightening the focus of the Phase 1 questions in light of the findings from the Phase 1 interviews and linked to the model which evolved from the review of literature which provided the conceptual framework, serves to further validate the research. Documenting the decisions taken and the nature of the sample is therefore important in terms of the trustworthiness, the credibility and the applicability of the research.

3.6c Triangulation

Bush (2002, p. 68) suggests that 'triangulation means comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena'. Morse and Richards (2002, p. 76) agree that triangulation gives the researcher multiple perspectives:

> 'To be considered triangulated, studies must "meet" – that is, one must
>
> encounter another in order to challenge it (for clarification), illuminate it (add to
>
> it conceptually or theoretically), or verify it (provide the same conclusions).'

However, interviewing others in the Academies, triangulation within the interview method would have been an ideal technique, but this was beyond the resources, time and scope of this study. Investigating the motivations and priorities for school improvement and the means by which this can be achieved of Academy Principals within their own organisations allows the interview data to be aligned and compared with the key elements arising from the literature review.

As Pring (2000, p. 6) states:

> 'Objectivity lies in the systematic and open attempt to check the interpretation of what happens against evidence. It lies, too, in the checking with other people as to whether those interpretations are the most appropriate ones.'

It would have been useful to consider the research questions from other people's perspectives, in order to clarify elements of the leadership characteristics and the process; but this was outside the resources of this project both in terms of time and budget. It would make an interesting extended study to look at the thesis of this research from the perspective of different roles within each Academy community.

3.7   Ethical Nature of the Research

A significant issue in research, particularly in interviewing, and one discussed by various writers is confidentiality; it is important to have the informed consent to the participants and to have agreement with them on the way of handling their contribution (Mason, 1996, pp. 56-58).

The underlying principles of educational research have been variously described as a commitment to honesty (Sammons, 1989) and an avoidance of plagiarism (Berger and Patchner, 1988). Pring (2000, p.143) identifies them as respect for the dignity and privacy of those people who are the subjects of research; and the pursuit of truth – the right to try to find out as carefully and accurately as possible. However the pursuit of truth is a problematic notion. It assumes that an increase of accurate information is beneficial to society (Chadwick, 2001). Bridges (2001) argues that it is essential to educational research, even if it is only to try to uncover what people understand to be truth through the interconnectedness of their beliefs.

An ethical framework for the researcher must 'inform their moral judgments in carrying out their work'. (Busher, 2002, p. 73). Christians (2000, p. 138) suggests that for research to be ethical 'subjects must agree voluntarily to participate' and 'their agreement must be on full and open information'. Robson (1994, p. 33) identifies ten questionable practices in social research:

1. Involving people without their consent or knowledge.
2. Coercing them to participate.
3. Withholding information about the true nature of the research.
4. Otherwise deceiving the participant.
5. Inducing them to commit acts diminishing their self-esteem.
6. Violating rights of self-determination.
7. Exposing the participants to physical or mental stress.
8. Invading their privacy.
9. Withholding benefits from some participants.
10. Not treating participants fairly, with consideration, or with respect.

Each of these relates to how the respondents are treated and the framework for this research study must, therefore, be based on a principle of not causing harm. This was achieved, in this study, by:

- the research subjects being informed about the purpose and context of the study by letter by way of invitation to participate (see Appendix A: sample letter to Principals);
- copies of the questions to be asked sent to the research subjects at least seven days prior to each interview;
- explicit prior permission was gained to use a digital voice recorder;
- anonymity was assured if requested;
- interviewee had the right to stop at any time, refuse to answer a question; monitor and withdraw the transcript;
- copies of the transcript were given to the interviewee to check for factual accuracy;
- permission to use the transcripts were gained and the purpose understood.

Throughout this research the participants were informed of the research methods, methodology and code of research ethics both of the NCSL and the University of Hull. The writing up of the research has been carried out in such a manner so that the interpretation and presentation of the data both respects participants' right to privacy whilst sustaining the right of others to know about the research and its outcomes (Burgess, 1989; Cohen *et al*., 2000).

3.8   Overview of this Research Study

This research study is concerned with interviews and subsequent case studies of 12 Academy Principals all of whom had been in post for three years at their Academy, focussing on the key leadership challenges and complexities specific to leadership of Academies in the first six years of the programme's inception. My initial research in this field was sponsored through a 3

year Research Associateship from the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) which extended into this PhD. Further extended published work with Professor Brent Davies funded by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) on 'Different Leaders for Different Schools' examined, analysed and delineated the key leadership challenges and strategies contributing to successful organisational development. I had sole responsibility for data collection, analysis, findings and report writing for the initial NCSL study and the PhD. The interview and coding schedules, together with the case studies which I developed for the NCSL and PhD research studies, became the format for the extended research for the SSAT with Professor Brent Davies.

3.9 Research Tools: Data Collection

Johnson (1994, p. 13) distinguishes between 'research approaches' defined as ' the main ways research can be tackled' and discussed in the previous section and 'research tools' described as 'the means by which different approaches to research are operationalised'. Amongst the research tools, she suggests that questionnaires, interviews, case studies, observation, the use of records and the use of diaries are appropriate for case study research. Previous detailed discussion on possible methodology available for this study has led to a reasoned conclusion that, given the reality of time and context for this research, that semi-structured interviews leading to the airing of leadership voices form the basis of the tools for data collection. The subsequent case study analysis arising from it via the coding and analysis of professionally transcribed digital recordings of the interviews complete the means of data collection.

3.10 Data Collection: The Sample for this Thesis

Denscombe (1998, p. 11) suggests that 'the sample needs to be carefully selected if there is to be any confidence that the findings from the sample are similar to those in the population'. The 'population' for this study is Academy Principals in England. There are two main approaches: probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

Probability sampling is based on the notion that the people who are chosen will in all probability be representative of the whole. Probability sampling would be beyond the resources of this study, since the time and the finances for the project were limited as were the number of Academy Principals in post for the required time of 3 years or more. It was not feasible to include a sufficiently large number of examples in the study, the number of which grew by 100% year on year as the study progressed in line with the Government's target of 200 open Academies by 2010 and a more recent announcement to extend this number to 400 soon after that date. . Therefore a non-random sampling technique was used as the basis for selecting the sample. The sample was, as Denscombe defines, purposive, the participants were hand picked for the project. Denscombe (1998, p. 15) describes this as when 'the researcher already knows something about the people'; in this study the participants were selected because they were likely to produce the best information. This approach was economical and informative. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 370) accept that qualitative researchers apply purposive sampling:

'They seek out … individuals … for whom the processes being studied are most likely to occur.'

Given the nature of the investigation and the limited resources, it was important that the twelve Principals were established for at least three years in their particular Academy. The fact that the researcher was, herself, working as an Academy Principal by the time the majority of the respondents were interviewed made access to other Academies and their Principals straightforward at a time when the political climate and attitude perpetuated by the media made access to Academies very difficult in order to protect the staff and students from adverse, often negative, media attention. However, it was important that interviews were conducted as early on in the researcher's own Principalship as possible to avoid over-familiarity with Principal colleagues and reduce objectivity in data collection, analysis and interpretation.

The very nature of the level of challenge in leading the first wave of Academies meant that the profile of most Academy Principals is that of being in their second or third headship, having proven success in leading and delivering successful outcomes in very challenging urban schools. Needless to say, the age profile tends to be in the early to mid 50's and the gender, typically more male than female in sample.

	Gender	Current Age Range	No. on Roll at time	Area	Years in post at Academy	No. of headships	Total years as head
Principal 1	Male	11-14	540	London	3	2	11
Principal 2	Male	11-18	1,350	Bristol	3	2	10
Principal 3	Male	11-18	1,200	London	2	2	10
Principal 4	Male	11-18	1,000	London	2	3	12
Principal 5	Male	11-18	1,200	London	2	2	9
Principal 6	Male	11-18	1,350	London	2	2	11
Principal 7	Male	11-18	1,250	London	3	3	14
Principal 8	Female	11-18	1,100	London	2	2	11
Principal 9	Male	11-14	450	London	2	3	18
Principal 10	Female	11-18	950	Kent	2	1	2
Principal 11	Male	11-14	450	London	1	2	6
Principal 12	Male	11-18	860	Kent	2	2	9

Table 3.10: The research study respondents

3.11   Data Collection and Recording

Several writers stress the prevalence of recording the interview or note taking (or a combination of both) to avoid or reduce the likelihood of distortion of the meaning intended by the respondent (Breakwell, 1990, p.80). Millar, Crute and Hargie, 1992; Powney and Watts, 1997; Kvale, 1996 *et al.* provide further advantages of and reservations about note-taking and recording. In order that genuine engagement by the interviewer is to be maintained throughout each session, it was appropriate that each interview be digitally recorded with the prior permission of the respondent and that the subsequent verbatim transcription is carried out

by a professional transcription service. Note taking, therefore, would not be necessary and would avoid any lapses in concentration or distraction on the part of either the interviewer or the respondent. It would also ensure that the respondent felt that there was a genuine focus on their every response and also that the interviewer could focus on clarifying or linking any points which the respondent may make during the interview session. The significant advantages of the recording and transcription method would help provide a faithful report of the actual responses during each interviews as a raw basis for coding and analysis.

The guidelines for the analysis of the case study interview data include: transcription, in this case due to the extensive hours of interviews, a professional transcription service is a valuable time saver, although there is argument to suggest that the researcher carrying out the transcription themselves picks up initial nuances. However, subsequent listening to the interview with the professionally prepared transcription some days later enables a freshness of interpretation to be gleaned by the researcher which outweighs the act of transcribing each interview themselves. Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole; delineating units of meaning relevant to the research questions; clustering units of relevant meaning; determining themes form the clusters of meanings; retuning to the interviewee for a second time if necessary and possibly identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews conducted; writing up a composite summary of all the interviews in an effort to capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated (Hycner, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p. 293). Various analytical techniques are also presented by Powney and Watts, 1987; Kvale, 1996; and Munn and Drever, 1990. Breakwell (1990, p.86) expresses the concern that pushing the interviewees' responses into categories may destroy the individuality of the original

comments; similar concerns are expressed by Mason (1996) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005). Therefore, it is appropriate that the written research analysis and findings of this study includes quotations in the form of 'leadership voices' in the style developed by Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005) from the respondents which show the depth and even the most subtle diversity of the opinions expressed.

3.12 Data Analysis: Coding

3.12a Coding Framework

Morse and Richards (2002, p. 1) suggest that 'collecting data is not a process separate from analysing data'. It was important to decide on the techniques for analysing the data at the same time as the choice of method for the data collection. The interviews would produce a large amount of data; it was important to choose a method to explore and understand their meaning. Watling (2002, p. 262) defines analysis as the 'elusive process by which you hope you can turn your raw data into nuggets of pure gold'. That seems a daunting prospect, but some of the decisions had already been made. The study is qualitative in approach and therefore the data will be word rich and there must be a way of creating meaning from the information. Before analyzing the data they must be classified or coded in some way in order to provide some sort of structure and meaning. How can the data be sorted? It seemed simple at the outset but rapidly became a complex task, owing to the extent of the promising information gathered where initially everything looked as if it mattered. It was important to condense and order the material. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 55) propose that 'selectivity seems endemic to data collection' and suggest that a researcher should be:

'Explicitly mindful of the purposes (of the study) and of the conceptual lenses you are training on it- while allowing yourself to be open to and re-educated by things you didn't know about or expect to find' (p. 56).

The conceptual framework and research questions allowed an initial coding framework, which was applied to the first interview transcript, and this helped to avoid overload.

Robson (1993, p. 242) recommends that 'two people are involved in coding text to improve reliability'. Reliability was increased through both my supervising Professor and second supervisor scrutinising the results of my analysis stage by stage on each of the first four transcriptions and subsequently moderating my coded interviews. After four of the interviews I added new codes to the coding schedule and refined this further after the fifth interview.

There are a number of factors, which shape the way in which a study is carried out, especially in relation to the availability of time, money and computer resources. The accessibility of the research subjects and ethical issues also have to be taken into account. This research study is based on face-to-face interviews, which were labour intensive, and the analysis was time consuming. Time is also a finite resource and setting realistic goals was important.

3.12b   Coding Software

There are computer packages available for coding, for example NUD*IST or Nvivo. Some of the advantages of this approach is the programmes help with data storage, searching and retrieval. However, in this study the time to get to know the programme, in order for its usefulness to be effective, and the costs of the package were prohibitive. The time to master

the package outweighed the time it would potentially save. The advantages of manual coding seem to be to allow for thinking time, time to imagine the concepts behind the data, and time with the information seemed too important to lose. The repeated handling of the data was an important part of the analysis of the data for this research and this would be lost with the use of a computer package. It was therefore decided not to use a computer package to support the analysis of the data in this research.

3.12c   Coding Procedures

Morse and Richards (2002, p. 110) state that the purpose of coding is to get 'from unstructured and messy data to ideas about what is going on in the data'. There are three main kinds of coding which enable the thinking up from the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe descriptive coding as the storage of information. The second type, described by Morse and Richards (2002, p. 112) as 'coding in order to gather material together by topic'. The third is the coding used when the goal is the development of concepts. Topic coding, where portions of the text associated with a particular topic are brought together, was problematic for this study as some passages may have been relevant to different topics and discovering patterns may have been difficult. Morse and Richards (2002, p. 112) suggest 'working on paper, you will need to copy a passage as many times as there are categories you wish to code it at, and finding patterns in that coding then becomes a challenge'. Descriptive coding was used to store factual information about the respondent and the context but it was not appropriate for the data made from the interviews. These data needed codes to act as labels, to enable the classification of the data but also to link the data with ideas. Analytic coding made it possible to create categories the analysis progressed. It allowed the exploration of new concepts and

allowed comparisons. As Morse and Richards (2002, p. 229) suggest: 'analytic coding is more a process of reflection on concepts and their relations'.

K/mot	Key motivators in wanting/choosing to lead an Academy
LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS / FEATURES/STYLES OF ACADEMY PRINCPALS	
L/dr	Drive / passion – the impetus which moves the individual
L/ent	Entrepreneurship – risk taking and blue sky thinking
L/stl	Styles – from a wide range of leadership styles as defined by literature and beyond exemplified in practice
L/skl&comp	Skills/competencies – key skills and competencies demonstrated in leadership
L/prio	Priorities – as perceived to secure success of the Academy
L/phil	Philosophy – on education and leadership
L/pers	Perspective – where the Academy needs to go, why, how and when
L/inn	Innovation – models beyond the 'norm' to secure success
L/act	Actions -
L/refl	Reflection
L/c&e	Culture & Ethos
L/strat	Strategy
L/mot	Motivators
L/aut	Autonomy
L/imp	Imperatives
L/sus	Sustainability
L/net	Networks
L/acc	Accountability
L/rel	Relationships
L/obs	Obstacles
L/con	Constraints
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ACADEMY PRINCIPALS	
P/mot	Motivators
P/mor&eth	Moral/ethical
P/soc	Social
P/pol	Political/political
P/inh	Inhibitors
P/accel	Accelerators
OPERATIONAL FACTORS CITED BY ACADEMY PRINCIPALS	
O/fin	Financial
O/pol	Political/political
O/Gov	Governance
O/Staf	Staffing
O/aut	Autonomy
O/sus	Sustainability

O/dep	Dependency
O/cons	Constraints
O/fac	Facilities
O/dif	Differences – from those experienced when leading a school other than an Academy
STRATEGIC FACTORS EXEMPLIFIED BY ACADEMY PRINCIPALS	
S/acc	Accountability
S/act	Actions
S/devp	Development
S/sust	Sustainability
S/int	Intent
S/pl	Plan
S/tim	Timescale – leadership skills and requirements in 3-5 years of the Academy from now

Figure 3.12c: The codes used in the analysis

This chapter has established the most appropriate methodology and methods to investigate the key elements of this research study. In summary this research project is qualitative in philosophy. The sample of 12 Academy Principals was purposive and opportunistic. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analytic coding was used to explore the data. The findings, in the next chapter will be discussed through the six elements using the conceptual framework model and Phase 1 and 2 interviews:

1. the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;

2. the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;

3. the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;

4. the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;

5. the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;

6. the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

CHAPTER 4   Research Findings and Analysis

4.1a   Establishing the research findings within the analytical framework

The identification of the six key elements as derived from the review of literature and refined and tested through the Phase 1 and 2 interviews were:

1. the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;

2. the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;

3. the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;

4. the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;

5. the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;

6. the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

The evolution of the dynamic model serves as the structural basis for examining the research findings. The format which follows is built upon an investigation of the dynamic relationship between the six elements and the leadership dimensions in the model in contributing to the successful leadership of Academies. What the model makes clear is that, at its core, is the need for transformational leadership to establish a firm footing. Yet this also needs to hold an equal position with the importance of sustaining the transformations and resultant successful outcomes which act as a foundation for future progress. Like the thesis itself which, from the outset recognises the complexity and challenge of leading an Academy, the task of addressing

the interrelationship of the six elements with the dynamic model has its own complexities. However, the Phase 1 and 2 interviews serve as the exemplification and evidence of the challenges and complexities in action as the sections which now follow illustrate through the voices of those Academy leaders interviewed.

4.1b Structure of Chapter 4

The structure of this chapter as it moves through the analysis can be represented in the diagram below. This example indicates a discussion and analysis of Transformational Leadership and its possible relationship or application to one or more of the six elements as derived from the review of literature and refined and tested through Phase 1 and 2 interviews :

Dynamic leadership dimensions of the conceptual framework model		The six elements as derived from the review of literature and refined and tested through Phase 1 and 2 interviews
Transformational Leadership		1. the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;
		2. the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;
Sustainable Leadership		3. the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;
Distributed Leadership		4. the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;
Political Leadership		5. the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;
Entrepreneurial Leadership		6. the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.
Strategic Leadership		

During each stage of analysis and discussion the dynamic leadership dimensions of the conceptual framework model will be discussed separately, the start of each new leadership dimension being clearly denoted through being coloured red on the model which prefaces each section.

4.2   General, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy

Whether, through interviewing the twelve Academy Principals in the sample, a broad generalised pattern of prerequisites for leading a successful Academy could be established was uncertain from the outset of the research. However, it became quickly evident from the initial three interviews conducted that there were recognisable patterns to the motivational and leadership characteristics of the respondents. The subsequent iterations of the interview questions made it possible to focus more clearly on the key questions of the thesis as the research progressed. This pattern continued with the subsequent nine interviews. Also what had to be established was what could or indeed should constitute a 'successful Academy'. In its broadest sense this was interpreted as meaning the improvement in student attainment outcomes both academically and socially, including further education placements and employment opportunities as a result of analysis by the Academy and DCSF against previous cohorts of students from the same school or the predecessor school. It also included staff recruitment and retention rates, rates of application for student admission to the Academy and pace of implementation of change and new initiatives against progress outcomes. However, an additional factor which arose from nearly all the interviews was that of the role the Academy had to play in the lives of the local community, in bringing them into the work of the Academy and winning its confidence and support in the process.

Possibly the single most powerful factor which emerged right at the start from all the interviews was the total commitment of all the Principals to the local Academy community, not just its student population, and the sense of addressing the social injustice and inequality of opportunity which the children and the community experienced. This was raised by several of the respondents, but notably articulated forcefully by two:

> *'I just felt there could be something really different and better educationally for people here and... the whole process of becoming an Academy and just being an Academy gave that idea that this was fresh new start without the sort of label that fresh start had.'*
> (Respondent 1)

> *'The predecessor school had lost the focus of why it was in the community. It wasn't in the community to be a babysitting service and to provide care; it was in the community to give these young people the best platform for their future life. It was about moving people into understanding and believing that we were going to be different and making sure they were confident that we could be different to make the difference and quickly.'*
> (Respondent 4)

The response from Respondent 1 appears much more general to that of Respondent 4 which is more detailed. What is shared is the belief of these respondents that an Academy really could bring a fresh start to a community and that people could and would believe and have confidence in the impact it could have on them for the better is very clear from this. Respondent 1 speaks in the first person with a seemingly emotional connection to the question and motivation in contrast to the third person response of Respondent 4, who, although committed to the community and what the Academy could contribute, presents a more practical and structured approach to the challenge. Although this reflects the specific position of two, all twelve respondents to some degree expressed a commitment to the local community as a personal motivator for them.

An overwhelming factor raised explicitly by all but one of the respondents was a personal and indeed altruistic attraction to the challenges the role offered in working with these communities. As one respondent said:

> *'I was philosophically sort of locked into the concept* [of Academies] *…. the whole sense of social justice really appealed to me and I'd always chosen to work in schools which had these type of challenges, so I guess my predisposition is to work with these types of children, these communities to help make a difference.'*
> (Respondent 9)

The fact that this respondent felt that they had a personal predisposition throughout their career to work with a certain type of community presenting specific challenges to *'help make a difference'* also points to their clear ideological belief and was further raised by other respondents, notably one who explained how:

> *'The way I see it is that all those middle class children whose parents pay an average of £8,000 a year on school fees, so it's £56,000 – even more by the time they are through because they think they are buying something better – I want to make sure our kids are on a level playing field, to get them three more rungs up the ladder by being in this Academy. You know so we do things properly, we take them on residential trips, we hand out awards in assembly and they learn how to shake hands properly and look me in the eye when they get it. We put it out that we're something a bit special, our uniform is very distinctive and that you are also special which mean that you can be very successful because you have the same opportunities as the very best schools. Parents and children buy into that big time.'*
> (Respondent 1)

Arguably falling into the realms of Passionate Leadership the realistically pragmatic belief by this respondent is not one of utopian aspiration but grounded in a sense of purpose and commitment to hard work on the part of the leadership to ensure that this would and indeed could be realised for their students at their school and indeed the community it serves.

Furthermore, this respondent makes a very open political comment through the comparison of private to state funded education and the public perception of the difference in value for money of private over public. Once again the belief of the respondent that the community will have confidence to *'buy into'* the whole concept that the Academy offers and will see that the Academy offers the *'same opportunities as the very best schools'* reflects the unswerving commitment of the Principal and the leadership characteristics of passionate, charismatic and arguably almost evangelical determination to making the school successful. Once again, this is evidenced through one of the respondents in explaining how:

> *'I'm the sort of person who always likes a bit of a challenge and, you know, there's that altruistic bit as well and you want to do good and it's happened that the children had suffered over generations through poor schools, etc. and this is on the site of a badly failing school so I thought well you know these kids could do with a good school and the opportunity to open one was there for the taking.'*
> (Respondent 9)

Although at times this could be seen to be almost flag-waving on the part of the respondent for their cause, this Principal expresses a clear determination in wanting the best opportunity for the children in the area and what is in fact a simple and basic right, that of '*a good school'*. This issue of actually having the *'opportunity'* was raised explicitly during the interviews by several of the respondents, with one expressing how:

> *'I really believed, and still do, that the opportunity to open an Academy here with the catchment and intake of this community would mean that we could provide a real comprehensive education for the children and not only that but make it a high achieving comprehensive school where everyone in the community could aspire to really achieving from. That opportunity wasn't there before for them'.*
> (Respondent 11)

The goal of creating an aspirational culture at the Academy which could be continued beyond its boundaries and impact on the community was a recurring theme arising from the interviews. Having an impact on the students themselves was raised by the majority of the Principals quite explicitly as being only part of the role of their Academy. An example being one respondent who explained how:

> *'It was the local community that really drew me here because I came down and walked around and I just felt that they deserved so much more than they were getting. They were being blamed for the state of the predecessor school and actually they'd already opted out and sent their youngsters elsewhere. I kind of wanted to create a school that was quite special for this particular community because I felt they were owed the chance.'*
> (Respondent 12)

This sense of equity for the local community which they had long been denied and a desire to provide something *'special'* which they *'deserved'* and which they had not had the opportunity to experience before reflects the personal commitment of this Principal, as with the others in the study, to a genuine engagement with the community which their Academy serves.

This commitment and altruism had been, arguably ironically at times as expressed by five of the respondents, initially at odds with the communities they were wishing to serve and help. One factor reported by all respondents was the varying levels of hostility which they initially experienced through being leaders of Academies. The level of personal resilience to the cause to which they were appointed and belief in what they are doing as Academy leaders emerges throughout the interviews. However, the sources of reported hostility and resistance was not the same in all cases with some being from the press, some from the local authority, some the

local community and others from schools and staff in the local area. Therefore it could be said that resilience and strength of character and determination to deliver successful outcomes amidst considerable hostility, resistance and, at times obstruction has also shown to be an early emerging prerequisite for leading a successful Academy. As one respondent explained:

> *'The local community here – they are very tight, generations and generations have been here very suspicious to anything new so you have to win them over, get inside the way they do things. I think we've done well in that respect but you do get deputations from time to time, and it's not one or two it's like fifteen to twenty of the locals, turning up demanding to see the Head and the language! - because someone has heard that someone else has said something to someone etc etc. It's a bit like the East End mafia in that respect but we work with them, make things open and that removes the suspicion. It'll take time, they've been here a lot longer than the Academy but at least they send their children here which is a start.'*
> (Respondent 1)

This position whereby the Academy is the new neighbour in a long-establish neighbourhood with its values and mores presents a further challenge for an Academy Principal. Yet once again in this example, the confidence of the local community has been secured as evidenced through the fact that the respondent states how '*at least they send their children here which is a start.'*

Not all of the respondents were in this position due to the nature of the creation of their Academy being the replacement of an existing school rather than the creation of a new one where previously there was none. Nevertheless, other challenges were faced by Principals whose Academies replaced failing predecessor schools in the local area with one respondent explaining how:

> *'In the early days we'd put an advert in looking for some middle management and, you know, didn't get many applications. The message seemed to have gone out that you're going to have to work harder for less money and your conditions of*

service won't be as good – so I had to network extensively to get staff and now we're so popular even the press want a slice of us all the time but I don't let them forget how they treated us three years ago – they're having to learn too'.
(Respondent 9)

It could be argued that this respondent, in reminding the local press that *'I don't let them forget how they treated us three years ago,'* is showing a degree of bitterness and resentment towards the hostility which the press helped to fuel at a difficult time in the start up of the Academy. However, conversely, it could be interpreted as the Principal's determination to protect the Academy and the community it serves having fought to secure a successful position as a school where it was once deemed a failure and the pride which comes with this position is fiercely protected by the leader of the organisation to the benefit of those it serves. Similarly, one respondent recounted how:

'The local authority don't go out of their way to involve us. They send us all the stuff to make sure we can't say we don't know what is going on but we don't really have representation on anything. They see us as separate from them but our kids are the same kids that went to the local authority school before, same staff work here – mostly – and we're not going away but it makes it difficult and it's a shame as we're all supposed to be there to provide the best opportunities for the pupils. They just don't like the fact that now we're a success and they see us as a threat. All I have to say is why did they let the place fail before – it took an Academy to sort it out and I don't think they like that but they could also learn something from us – it's not us preventing the relationship.'
(Respondent 10)

This belief by the respondent that it is the way in which the local authority views the Academy and not the parents, students or wider community which has produced the distancing is an interesting one. Indeed it is a perception, albeit arguably evidenced by the Principal to some extent, and there is no opportunity to evidence in this study or counter this claim of the local authority's response to the claims against it. However, the relationship and hostility of the

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local authority towards the Academy was raised as a specific issue by ten of the twelve respondents and would be an interesting line of research for further study.

Much has been said here of the importance of gaining the confidence of the community in the setting up a new Academy and, as one respondent recounted:

> *'There had been a huge parental campaign in the area for a new school because there just weren't enough school places. However the solution which was offered to the campaign was not the solution the parents who had led the campaign wanted. And so there was a situation set up where parents felt disappointed in what had been presented and that then set up a certain defensiveness where parents were, particularly the leading parents in the campaign, felt they were kept outside of the Academy so I had to do a lot of work to change that and welcome them in from that pre-history I inherited. It took a lot of time and energy but it has certainly paid off.'*
> (Respondent 11)

This mis-matching of expectation against what was provided is a factor which four of the respondents talked about. A situation whereby the perceptions of the local community and what is finally delivered are at odds with what was hoped for is an interesting point. In each of the four cases where the community *'felt disappointed'* in the solution delivered there was a considerable amount of extra work on the part of the Principals to ensure that confidence could be won and the community brought on side. The one exception to this is that of the respondent who explained how:

> *'The site had been left to literally rot for several years and as soon as there was rumour of a new school opening here there were literally hundreds of parents phoning up the local authority to see how they could get their children in. This was before anything was even confirmed or signed by the DfES and the sponsor – just based on a rumour and a little bit in the local papers. They were so desperate to get their children into a local school they didn't even seem to want to know what that school would be about. The fact that what was delivered was an Academy with all the things that we stand for which are very different here from the other*

schools in the borough didn't seem to bother them. They just bought into it, like buying off plan!'
(Respondent 3)

This apparent desperation of a community for a new school is an interesting point. The fact that they were prepared, seemingly without question, to accept the provision for their children to be an Academy suggests that the community wanted a new school with good facilities and are less bothered about the governance and funding issues.

In working openly with the local community, keeping them informed and enabling them to experience the work of the Academy and the aims of those working in it together first hand, the degree of suspicion could be reduced. Winning the confidence of the immediate stakeholders and those who serve as the mouth-piece for the local community was central to ensuring that any other obstacles from the national arena be ridden through. It became clear from talking to the Principals that, despite the national resistance from some quarters, it was the local resistance or support which could and would make or break the success of the Academy and that once the local confidence was won, national pressures had little if any direct effect on the way progress could be made and leadership operate in the Academy.

Nine of the twelve respondents had previously led schools in challenging circumstances, moving them to a position of successful attainment and social outcomes during their time in post. All but one had been Headteachers previously and for three the Academy post was their third Headship. In nearly all cases they believed that experience in schools with similar challenges was invaluable if not essential experience in leading an Academy. In reflecting

upon their experience they had had previously in headship and its contribution to that as an Academy Principal, one respondent explained how:

> *'To make it work it's about the ethos and having the faith and keeping it. That's what I learnt from my previous headship and it has to be the central ingredient. It's about the ways of working and it's about the encouragement that the staff are now giving the students that they never had in the predecessor school. It's also about our ambition as well really – you know when we first started people around here weren't sure it would work, people weren't sure if we could break out of the vicious cycle of the predecessor school but now they believe it can work. They don't even question that it can because they see that it's working and they actually want it to be the best and they want it to be special and that's just creating its own energy really.'*
> (Respondent 12)

The idea of an altruistic motivation to the challenge of leading Academies has been raised previously in this chapter and this concept of *'having the faith and keeping it'* as well as creating a feeling of *'ambition'* to believe that you can create *'the best'* and to have stakeholder buy-in *'to be the best and …want it to be special'* is a strong recurring theme expressed by all respondents at some stage of the interviews. This altruism is further expressed by one respondent in expressing their belief that:

> *Academy Principals have got to have incredible self….and I don't mean arrogance, but self-confidence and belief in what they are doing and in their vision for what they want to see achieved. I do think at least initially they have to have a lot of drive and you know real sense of purpose about what they're doing. I think that confidence has to extend to be able to do some of the things that are not pleasant to do and actually have the confidence that it's the right thing. I learnt that in my first headship and it was much harder then but second time round I know what has to be done and why and therefore it is easier if that's the right word. It is easier because I know that the final outcomes will be better for everyone.'*
> (Respondent 2)

However, the additional dimension stated by this respondent of the need for personal *'confidence'* and belief that what has to be done to secure the desired outcomes and improvement is *'easier'* the second time round in headship raises the question of whether only those with previous experience of leading schools in challenging circumstances are best suited to leading an Academy. Certainly other respondents were quick to draw upon their experiences as headteachers prior to their leadership of an Academy as one explained:

> *'Having been a Head in two other schools I have always had a commitment to what I guess you could call righting the wrongs of the past and so this Academy gave me the opportunity to further develop the work I had done in turning around my previous two schools and this was really appealing, hugely energising for me to think it was possible and indeed really believe it was possible.'*
> (Respondent 4)

Although this respondent did not elaborate upon the means by which the previous schools referred to were actually improved, once again this level of self-belief or confidence that *'it was possible'* is powerfully communicated. There is also a clear feeling of personal pride conveyed by this respondent in the mention of *'the work I had done in turning around my previous two schools'*, which could arguably be interpreted as bragging but conversely conveying a sense of personal pride in *'righting the wrongs of the past'* which the respondent also talks about. This openness to speak out and act to redress the balance of power, opportunity and status in society through education was also articulated by one respondent who explained how:

> *'You are always in the spotlight as an Academy Principal. I wasn't anywhere near as exposed when I was a head before but it did make me aware of what I might have to deal with and how to shelter the school from it a bit. Maybe it's because we are the first of the breed but basically you're under the media spotlight all the time. If something goes wrong or has attention drawn to it you can be sure it'll be in the press later in the week, and that's the national more than the local press. So*

I think Academy Principals have a lot of political awareness about how their actions and the work of their schools never goes unnoticed and I think this pressure can rub off onto staff and the kids too – apart from if it's good news because the media only want it when it bleeds – you know when it bleeds it leads!'
(Respondent 3)

Once again this respondent had been the head of a school previously but makes specific note of the differences in the level of public attention given to the post and the need of Academy Principals to be aware of how to deal with it and ensure it does not impact detrimentally on their school. The suggestion may appear to convey a feeling of a constant battle for this respondent with the press and other forces with the attention being on *'if something goes wrong'* yet the close public scrutiny was an issue raised by five of the respondent as an aspect of their leadership that they had not had to deal with to the degree they did as Academy Principals when they were leading previous schools.

With all of the respondents without exception, key elements emerge through the interviews: a commitment to addressing social injustice and to righting the wrongs of the past educationally and socially for a whole community; a belief in the possibility and positive impact of change through the model of Academies; a self-belief and resilience to both internal and external pressure against the change; a real ability to work with a range of stakeholders and win their confidence and support; a drive for excellence in all that is done; an awareness of the public profile of the Academies programme and the local impact on a particular school; and the strength to be able to operate, often against the odds and amidst deep suspicion, in thinking outside the box to look to the wider picture of what can be done to change the existing experiences of the children and their communities for the better. It is from this initial identification of the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy that the

model lends itself in relation to the leadership characteristics as identified through the interviews.

4.3   Leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals

In order to transform the outcomes for the children and community an Academy serves it is clear from both the review of literature and through the interviews that leadership's core role is to challenge the previous systems, regimes and, in doing so, literally transform the way in which things are done to effect change. In the July 2007 PricewaterhouseCoopers Academies Evaluation 4th Annual Report (pp. 74-75) some of the key observations noted during their visits and reported by Sponsors and staff in respect of behaviours and characteristics of highly effective Academy Principals, included:

- High visibility around the school
- A strategic approach to building leadership across the school which included distributed leadership models
- A strategic approach to Performance Management which is linked to professional development and career development pathways
- Strategic recruitment
- Entrepreneurial re-branding of the school

Some of these are further borne out in more detail in the following research findings and analysis in this chapter.
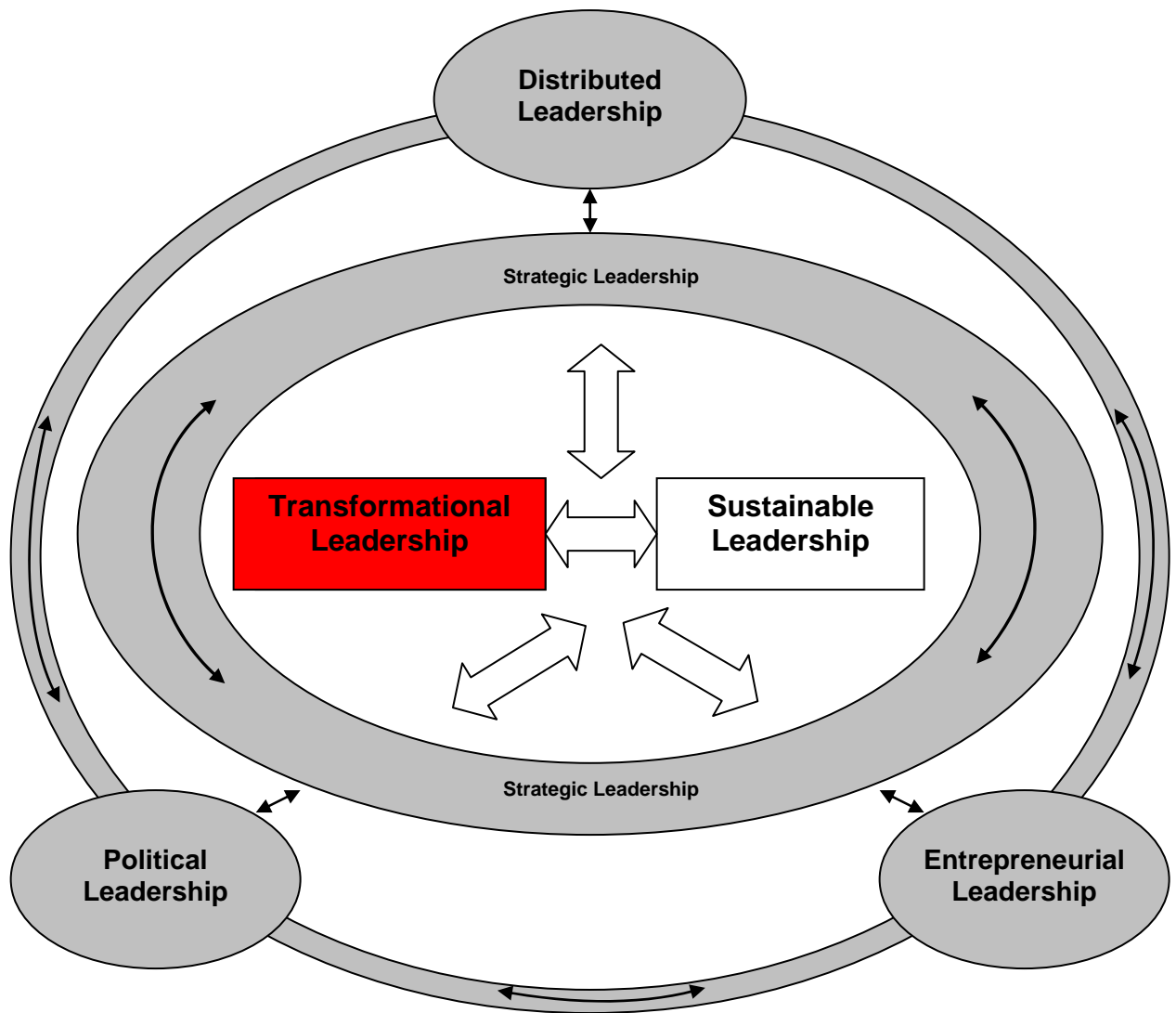
Figure 4.3a Transformational leadership as a dynamic element contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

The model lends itself well to this stage of explanation of the research findings and analysis. It is only by examining the defining leadership characteristics of the existing Academy Principal respondents that the aspects combine to effect the transformation. Evidence from Leithwood *et al*., (2004) suggests that practices associated with transformational leadership may be widely distributed throughout an organisation. As one respondent recounts:

'I remember one of the Heads of Faculty saying at a meeting we had... 'when we move into the new Academy building we've done all this preparation work together and it's our building, our school and we decide how it's organised, you know, we the teaching staff', and they do lead their own areas, they run their subject floors, they have taken control of their areas and they mirror what we do throughout the school so it's consistent all the way throughout where ever you are. We built that up together which is great. There's a massive huge, team spirit.'
(Respondent 1)

This level of empowerment which in turn serves to energise and further mobilise the staff is a key feature of many of the Academy Principals interviewed and their way of operating. It also has a direct impact on organisational culture which is a major cornerstone of transformational leadership.

Bass's (1997) consideration of transformational leaders in which he identifies four categories within transformational leadership of charisma, inspirational leadership, individualized considerations and intellectual stimulation together with a general rapid pace in movement and action to achieve the goals are also features of the respondents in this assessment of their leadership characteristics. In recognising potential and inspiring others as leaders one Principal articulated how:

'We've got Fast Track teachers why not fast track them all the way through to headship, that's the idea but the way we do it, the way we organise it needs to be looked at. I'm having a Future Leader here so that I can mentor them and get them through to Vice Principal position. But if we were a limited company or whatever, if we were in the private sector somebody would be saying ... look I've got this junior executive, he's got what it takes, let's see... let's move him and fast track him through, let's really develop him for the top job – if we had that in schools then we wouldn't have to go through all this open competition nonsense when most of those on the shortlist for Principals couldn't survive the role in an Academy anyway so why bother wasting time.'
(Respondent 9)

In recognising the impact of leadership structures in established organisations in the private sector, in commerce and industry, the challenge for this respondent is to break the norms or traditionally expected systems of leadership and promotion but also to somehow convey the need to operate differently in preparing, recruiting and training leaders for these particular roles so that mistakes are not made. At all levels of appointment within the Academies, Principals spoke of the type of people they looked for in working in their schools. As one respondent explained:

> *'I've appointed relatively young staff here – they're all sharp enough to know that in two or three years as a Head of Faculty here, they'll get a Deputy Headship without too much difficulty at all… this breaths life and energy into what we do and they say I inspire them but they inspire me and each other so we feed off each other's energy and ideas and the place flies because of it.'*
> (Respondent 2)

In some respects this statement can be aligned to the notion of distributed leadership with ideas and effective delegation and responsibilities being devolved across the organisation which, as this Principal explains *'breaths life and energy into what we do'*. Similarly, the opportunity to attract staff from a seemingly wider employment arena than in more traditional schools and having the openness and enthusiasm to do this also has advantages for the whole Academy as another Principal explained:

> *'Because we're new and many of the staff are new to the job, some have come from other professions – like I have one who was a chartered accountant and another who worked for BP - they don't have the baggage of old local authority systems which are often very slow so they just want to get on with the job and make it work – they seek out opportunities to take on responsibility. I don't have to ask them all the time they get a feel for the way the place is running and needs to run and seize the opportunities. It's much easier to change things with this type of attitude than what you might get in heavily unionised schools so in the end the children get a much better deal.'*
> (Respondent 1)

The use of the phrases *'seek out'* and *'seize the opportunities'* does suggest an energy which this respondent believes is part of the driving force in the Academy. However there is also a clear message given about this respondent's views of local authorities and the role of schools which are unionised which sends a political message about this respondent and perhaps the way they view the maintained education sector which is far from favourable although this is not articulated beyond what is said here.

The commitment of the respondents to remain tightly focussed on their mission to transform the life chances and educational opportunities for the students in their Academy was further communicated through the comments from three respondents:

> *'I'm a bit Jesuit really … you know, give me your child and when they're 11 I will get them a first class education here at my Academy… you know. I really do believe that.'*
> (Respondent 1)

> *'I think you have to be quite an independent thinker to be able to transform attitudes, mind sets and the whole culture and ethos which has been ingrained for generations in the families of the local community. I mean you really do have to do wonderful new things, and appreciating the local context is important. This school was created very much with the local community in mind and that's why we have a very formal uniform… one which the local people will respect and when they have issues they can't just come storming in here we ask them to write formally with their concerns and they know it will be dealt with in a professional way without the heat.'*
> (Respondent 9)

> *'If building a motor vehicle engineering workshop and a hair salon here plus a catering and restaurant facility is what provides the skills and training which our young people want and which matches the local and national needs of employers then I don't have a problem with it. If the schools down the road say that we're diluting things to just get the kids a job then fine – yes, I do want them to get the skills to get a job and traditional A levels and academic subjects are not the only route to employment so I do what we need to do for our kids to get them*

economically secure in the future and for them to feel and see they actually can achieve.'
(Respondent 7)

Each of these respondents clearly articulates their personal belief in providing for the local community and not simply fitting in with an off-the-peg solution which may be a poor fit for the needs of the community. Repeatedly the importance of '*appreciating the local context'* is a key statement made by respondents in one form or other and the notion of treating the local community with a *'respect'* which they may not have received in the past another factor which the Principals interviewed made clear as an important consideration in how they went about tailoring the Academy's provision for the community both of its students so that they can *'feel and see they actually can achieve'* and also for the wider Academy community it serves.

In transforming the way in which staff, children and the community perceive education and its role and means of achieving success considerable interpersonal skills have been shown by the respondents as necessary. In creating networks with other schools, with the community and building relationships which help create and develop the culture and ethos as different from that of any predecessor school the respondents show strength in belief and determination against what can sometimes be deemed resistance or suspicion from others. Having the courage to stand firm against a tide of suspicion and indeed opposition, amidst close public scrutiny and maintain the energy levels to do so for a considerable period whilst the Academy becomes established are further leadership characteristics of the existing Academy Principals interviewed. Furthermore, these transformational actions need to be sustainable. This was expressed by one Principal through their personal experience of having to be proactive in such a process:

'You've got to do a lot of unlearning of people to get away from the bad habits that were leading to failure in the past. That takes a lot of time, a lot of talking and a lot of modelling. It has to be reflected in the way you do everything - in talking to parents, the way you talk to students in the corridors, how you are with the staff ... everyone needs to see how you want it to be done so they can feel secure in mirroring it. In some ways it's like acting all day but it's an act I believe in and so it becomes part of the person. I can see me and many of the things we are changing here in words the staff say at meetings or when the children answer my questions. It's not like they are brainwashed, but they can see the point of it – the outcomes - and that it works for the better.'
(Respondent 6)

In some respects modelling what is a desired behaviour is one way of attempting to change practice. It has to be considered though whether the modelling of behaviour by one person, and indeed a person in a position of authority and influence, is necessarily the correct or most appropriate one for the organisation and its members. Distributing the leadership helps with the checks and balances of this approach and the very fact that this respondent states that *'It's not like they are brainwashed'* does provide some reassurance that there is a level of thought behind what is taking place as part of the transformational processes in this context. As another respondent explains:

'There were no clear lines of personal accountability so I had to recruit stakeholders and key players within the existing staff to help transform the way the place was running very very quickly. There wasn't actually much resistance to it because most of the staff were just relieved it was all being 'normalised' as they saw it. However that was just the start, and we needed to keep things moving quite swiftly so that we could make up for lost time the children had had. Now we just keep the momentum and I can start to look towards the sustainability and strategic aspects of what we need to do and where we need to go next.'
(Respondent 11)

In this respect, the respondent appears to claim that the staff members were in support of the actions and the pace of change and indeed welcomed it. Being able to transform an organisation as complex as a school and then start to work in a manner more conducive to

strategic planning and sustainability requires considerable steering and careful braking to avoid the momentum which has been built up crashing down around the organisation and forcing a regression rather than progression. The means by which this may be successfully managed is explained by the respondent below:

> *'To transform this place it was all about the management of change and moving people from either a state of conscious or unconscious incompetence to a position where they can be proud of what they do, have confidence in what they do. Raising expectations in the face of enormous challenge, sustained challenge that just does not seem to ever go away. Transforming things here is not a quick fix and so a lot of resilience on the part of everyone is required and that isn't something that will happen overnight and then you can just move onto the next thing. You have to keep people's spirit up and that is a huge drain on any leader but it has to be done – it's like you are the unofficial life blood of the organisation whilst it is being transformed.'*
> (Respondent 7)

This highly thoughtful and indeed articulate and honest expression of what is a very complex leadership challenge points up the importance of transformation not being a *'quick fix'*. Yet the impetus needs to be maintained and the central force for ensuring it is done is the leader who serves as *'the unofficial life blood of the organisation whilst it is being transformed.'* In terms of the characteristics of an Academy leader this suggests the importance of stamina both physical and emotional as this respondent states how *'You have to keep people's spirit up and that is a huge drain on any leader but it has to be done'*. This mirrors the comment from the previous respondent regarding the energising effect which momentum can have on the process of transformation.

Transformational leadership has a serious and indeed fundamental role itself in the establishment of Academies in order for them to work, but keeping the momentum and establishing the foundations upon which to develop further whilst also transforming at a pace is an equally important dimension if Academies are to be successful. Certainly the interviews have shown that the demands upon leadership to adapt and bring into play a very wide repertoire of leadership skills means that Academy Principals are tested and challenged to the extreme and keeping the balance and checks for an extended period are a real test of outstanding leadership. With the majority of exiting Academy Principals in the final stages of their active leadership careers the challenge of ensuring sustainability beyond their tenure demands serious consideration and is certainly at the forefront of concern as the first Academy Principals near retirement and the future of these organisations need to be secured and planned for.

Distributed Leadership

Strategic Leadership

Transformational Leadership

Sustainable Leadership

Strategic Leadership

Political Leadership

Entrepreneurial Leadership
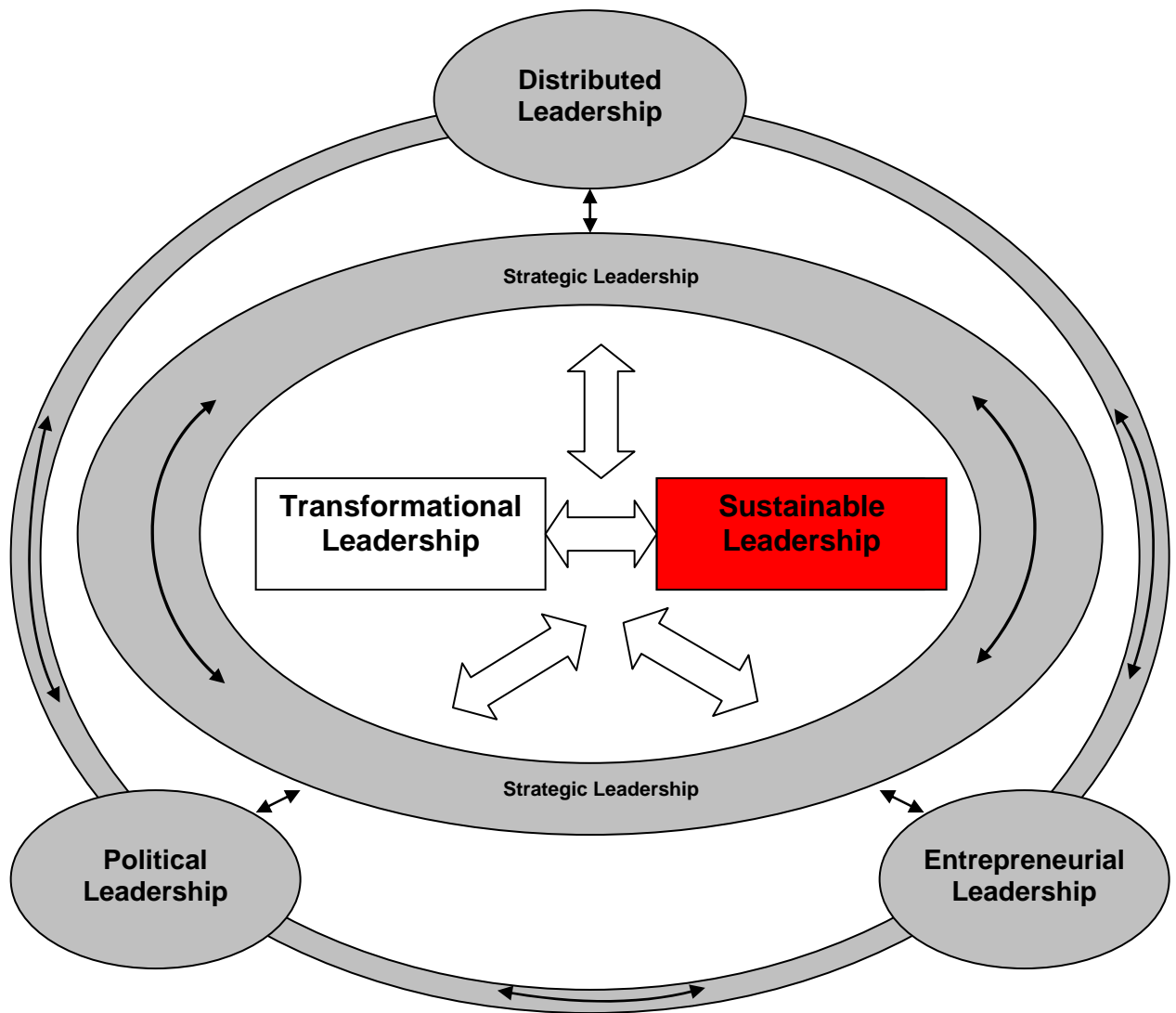
Figure 4.3b Sustainable leadership as a dynamic element contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

As Hargreaves and Fink (2003, p. 696) note, sustainability is not to be confused with maintainability:

'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.'

Each Principal interviewed articulated in some form the central importance of the need to build sustainability and plan for it at an early stage in transforming the school. One expressed how:

> *'...in a way at the moment there's a sort of dependency culture and I'm not saying that's good or right, but at the moment it works. Now clearly what I have to do ... is to begin to think in terms of some sustainability in all of that and begin to unpick that because people seem to think that by me leading on everything if I bring others into play it'll all somehow suddenly fall apart which it won't but they are quite wary of it.'*
> (Respondent 4)

It could be argued that this respondent, in stating '*Now clearly what I have to do ... is to begin to think in terms of some sustainability,*' is still leaning towards sole leadership with little thought or intention of getting others involved at this next stage in the process and thus risking extending and maintaining the very '*dependency culture'* which they speak of. In fact there is an undertone of the hero-leader conveyed through what is said in contrast to the respondent who spoke of how:

> *'I've got to think about the needs of the school further down the line now, it's this sustainability thing. I mean I have to plan a little for my succession clearly and the school will be in a different place in a couple of years time and I'm probably not the best person to take it into the next phase so I need to make sure I set it up for the next person to come along and how it can all run if I'm not here. I wouldn't tell the staff that because they've only just started to gain their own confidence but some of them are wanting to take on things and take a real lead and they will continue long after I've left here.'*
> (Respondent 12)

In this case, the respondent is very much aware of the need to plan not only for sustainability in terms of the Academy but also succession planning for leadership. In recognising that this may be unsettling for the staff of the organisation at a time of transformational change they

shelter the staff from the immediacy of it whilst ensuring that strategic planning for this occurs

behind the scenes until the staff and the organisation as a whole is stable enough to deal with

the next stage of development and a possible new leadership. This strategy for moving at a

pace through transformational change of the Academy towards sustainability was also

discussed by another respondent thus:

> *'You have to work at serious speed as an Academy Principal and, you know all*
> *these massive changes that Academies are supposed to make overnight – or at*
> *least what the press seem to expect – miracles! Well yes, we do have to transform*
> *things but I'm not prepared to make transformational changes that aren't*
> *sustainable, so if that means at some point I have to say, well what I've done in the*
> *first round is, you know the quick fairly easy fixes that should have been in place a*
> *long time ago, but now the second phase is in more depth, much more sustainable*
> *for the school even after I have moved on, then that's what I'll do. I have to make*
> *sure that what we do now is sustainable and robust otherwise there is no real*
> *point to it for the kids or staff and it needs to be properly developed further on that*
> *basis.'*
> (Respondent 12)

Again, the recognition that there is a need to plan for leadership succession as well as for

sustainability and that, for it to be robust there is an importance that transformational changes

should be sustainable right from the start. An interesting feature of this respondent is the

confidence in the actions that have to be taken even if the press choose to pass comment.

Whilst on another level this could be seen as arrogance on the part of the respondent, the

reasoning behind the actions and confidence in some way gain the attention of those who

listen to what is said and it is arguably the addition of the statement that '*otherwise there is no*

real point to it for the kids or staff' which fixes this response in the realms of altruism and

genuine commitment to the organisation and not the self. As has been stated from the outset of

this research, Academies have been established to deliver significant improvement in

performance. This transformation is the central leadership driving force of all the Principals

interviewed. They all recognised the importance of rapid change and improvement and realised that it was their foremost challenge and that they own and their senior staff's positions depended on achieving those outcomes. However, it was clear that leaders in the Academies did not see this as being achieved by a series of 'quick fixes' but by fundamental improvement in learning and organisational culture that was sustainable. Once again, as one respondent explained in some detail:

> *'...to sustain this I really have got to inspire people to lead from the middle and further down. I mean when we do our next round of staff conferences which will be in September now, I want to put people into those lead activities who are from the main skilled staff, so I want less and less of me to be saying, you know this is what we're doing, this is what we want to do, I want it to come up from them. I had to lead from the front initially because there wasn't anyone else to do it, but the sustainability will come only if people you know are coming in and believing in the difference that can and is being made, have the skills and are prepared to share those skills with colleagues and actually talk about teaching in the classroom. So it's about giving strength to staff from the middle to lead and it's about giving people the confidence to make decisions because they're not used to that. You've then got ownership throughout and it helps create the sustainability factor.'*
> (Respondent 8)

From this direct comment, based on experience, on the need to employ sustainability in leadership and, in turn, establish sustainability for the school to secure the future of the Academy also emerges the importance of distributing that leadership as part of the broader cycle within the momentum of organisational development. This was explained by one respondent in relation to the way it has been purposefully managed in their Academy:

> *'The strain on Academy Principals is enormous and sustainable leadership is both a strategic but also operational imperative. The job cannot be done with the external and internal demands without having the confidence in your leadership team and you know that has to be achieved very very quickly. I mean I've got three of my colleagues here doing the NPQH and I've designed a kind of structure so that there's a direct replacement for me if and when required. We need to*

contribute to building up a stockpile of school leaders to sustain what we have started.'
(Respondent 11)

By actively planning for succession and sustainability, this respondent creates a feeling of confidence for the future of the organisation which may well be, if reality matches what has been said by the respondent, mirrored by those *'colleagues'* mentioned. Further more, the very mention of a *'stockpile of school leaders'*, trained and developed within the challenges of the Academies Programme, suggests a possible source of future leaders with the skills, experience and confidence to undertake the leadership challenge beyond their existing Academy, thus strengthening the leadership within the expanding Academies programme in general.

Beyond the need to both transform and then sustain the organisation as discussed and exemplified in some detail here, the dynamic leadership model proposes the three further key leadership dimensions of **Distributed**, **Political** and **Entrepreneurial** leadership required to ensure sustainability serve in the model to 'orbit' the core. These are notionally propelled by the '**Strategic**' ribbon of 'inner atmosphere', symbolic of the culture and ethos which binds the organisation together at its heart and all its component parts which draws them at various times towards the core depending upon what is required during the process of transformation and sustainability and will each be discussed in turn now starting with the role of Distributed leadership.
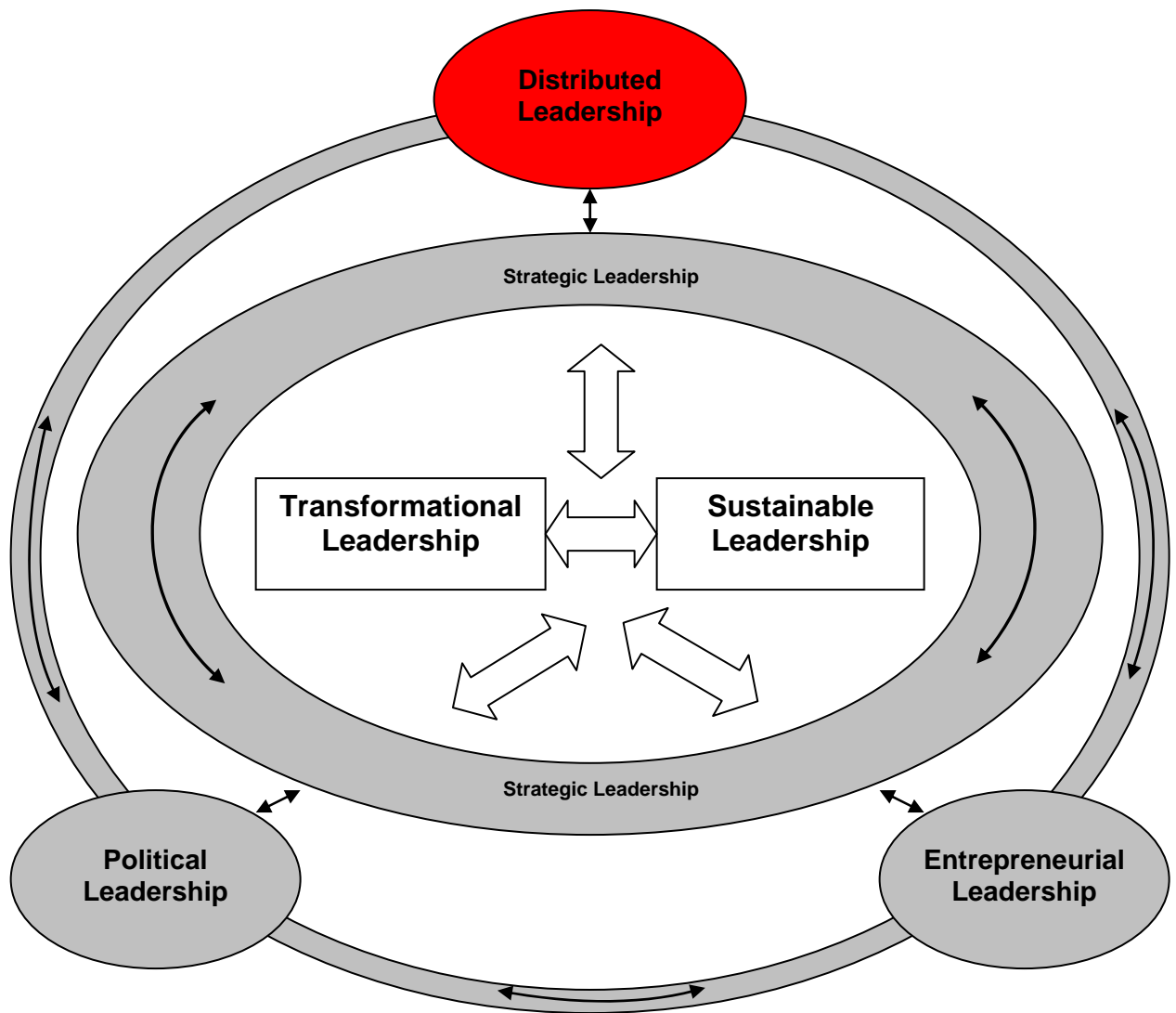
Figure 4.3c Distributed leadership as a dynamic element contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

Silns and Mulford (2002) identified that outcomes for a school tend to improve where the sources of leadership are distributed throughout the school and where staff are empowered to take a lead in areas that are important to them. Distributed leadership is premised upon high levels of 'teacher involvement' and encompasses a wide variety of 'expertise, skill and input' (Harris and Lambert, 2003, p.16). Ensuring that as many people are involved at the core of leadership activity is the basis of distributed leadership in action and, in order for the

transformation to be sustained, it is shown by several of the respondents that it is crucial from an early stage in the development of the Academy that leadership cannot and should not be a sole person activity if the move from transformation to sustainability and continual growth of the school is to be effected. This is explained by one of the respondents as follows:

> *'Critical is building teams. I think of the traditional model that perhaps as a Head when I was an LEA school Head of being the charismatic central figure of the school, well I don't know if I'm charismatic or not you know it doesn't matter, but it was that sort of role to now actually having one where the leadership really does have to be delegated though the organisations – you know, dispersed through the organisation with others seeing themselves as leaders. Like the PE Programme Leader chap who just popped in, he's as much a leader as I am, just in a different aspect of the work of the school. Yes, it's distributing leadership so that you build teams that work effectively together to drive up standards with again that shared vision and objective. It's this way of keeping everyone and the whole place on track and then it continues to move forward.*
> (Respondent 2)

By recognising both as a senior leader but also by making it a publically recognised feature within the organisation that leadership is a shared activity based on team working and sharing ideas and best practice, both the pace and momentum forward can be maintained because not one but many parts of the machine are helping to drive it. However, the process by which leadership can be delegated successful is not always immediately successful on all counts as explained by one respondent:

> *'Having the confidence to allow some of that driving to come from elsewhere. You know I do feel one of the things that's happened since 2003 and beyond it … before it really is so much of the drive has been coming from me as the one individual and for the future health of the school, I have to let go. Sometimes things will go hopelessly wrong, but I've got to not have a blame approach about that, it's about building that competence and confidence in the organisation by sharing the responsibility for the leadership and there are signs that that's happening. I do feel that I'm losing control of things I used to have control of, but I don't mean that in a negative sense and I think that's quite good. It's quite interesting that sometimes I'll find out things now and I think oh I'm surprised, I*

didn't realise that was happening and I don't see that negatively. I think that's really quite good because it means that things are being moved forward within the framework that we've set up. I think it shows confidence in the organisation to move forwards with all the component leadership parts at various levels.'
(Respondent 3)

Having the confidence and correctly judging the timing to place the organisation in a position where it is stable enough to actually sustain some unsuccessful aspects in the delegation of certain aspects of leadership is important. Whilst providing both individuals and the organisation as a whole the opportunity to learn from the less successful experiences, is another important stage in the move towards developing a culture of successful and ultimately effective distribution of leadership.

The breadth of work which Academies encompass beyond that of the core of educating young people was noted by several principals, often fuelled further by the positions and expertise of their Sponsors and members of their governing body who could provide opportunities for the organisation far beyond what most other schools would ever have access to. In order to take full advantage of such opportunities which ultimately benefit the Academy and its students and staff Principals have rightly identified the need for distributed leadership as a capacity to make such diversity work. Such is the breadth of the demands and diversity on senior leadership of Academies as recounted by several respondents that the skills base of the whole senior teams needs to be developed under the leadership of the Principal as one respondent stated:

'You are expected to work across a bigger agenda and get better quicker than people have done before and that means there is an awful lot to do in terms of leadership challenges therefore it's essential to get a good senior leadership team and trust them and really distribute the leadership. And that's not just for the

senior team, it needs to go all the way down and that is often in fact where the biggest challenge in distributing leadership lies and it's essential to have very close line management to make sure that works otherwise the whole thing could go badly wrong, but that way people can learn and learn well.'
(Respondent 10)

Close line management such as that referred to above allows for both monitoring and quality assurance checks but also coaching and an opportunity to test and share ideas on a broader front to middle leaders. The very fact that most respondents reported having a senior team larger in number than that typical of many maintained schools was also an important feature of the way in which their leadership operated and the level of accountability for delegated activities was established. This is also stated by another respondent:

'It is essential to share the leadership if things are to move quickly. I look for people who have enough experience, enough vision, enough common sense to be able to make the judgements to help to move things on here but who can also learn from being here with me. They also need to be team players in the widest sense because I can't ever be that close and so they have to have the ears and eyes of all the staff and their distributed leadership teams to make those judgments correctly and get a positive result. I trust them explicitly.'
(Respondent 11)

In both of these examples the explicit mention of the need to *'trust'* the team to whom the leadership elements are distributed is central to the way the leadership operates. Also the importance of learning being a key factor in the process so that leadership and improvement can be further sustained, even when mistakes are made the emphasis is not upon apportioning blame but learning from the mistakes and moving on to improve from them. However, the emphasis is not only on distributing leadership to teaching staff. PricewaterhouseCoopers in their Academies Evaluation 4th Annual Report (July 2007, p.74) report how:

'a key focus for many of the principals is the recruitment and development of both teaching and non-teaching staff and 'distributing' leadership across the whole organisation. Staff training (a number of Academies have allocated generous resources – up to £1,500 per staff member for professional development), shared leadership opportunities and joint development opportunities have all helped to create the vision that it is genuinely owned and shared by all.'

Bringing in the importance of non-teaching staff as central players in the success of Academies and their status as equal to that of teaching staff is a common factor raised by most of those interviewed. As one respondent stated when asked about the role of other key staff in the move for further distributing the leadership within the Academy to ensure that those who have the specialist skills are able to take the lead in the specialist areas often fulfilled by local authorities in the maintained sector, the response was:

> *'Making sure that you've got people in place who can run the show, run the payroll, run the contracts... or run the HR, so you as principal can do what you're paid to do which is improve the standards and not get embroiled in the building or finance or catering or whatever and the teaching staff can get on with teaching. So it's important that the Principals employ good people who can take the challenge of the distributed leadership and make it work and get it right.'*
> (Respondent 9)

With all twelve respondents in the sample coming from a teaching background and with the expectation from many of their teaching staff at the start that they would operate in a role which was more that of a traditional headteacher, Principals new to the job stressed the extent to which they had to model the role in a highly concentrated way in order to embed the culture

and ethos of the Academy before being in a position to feel confident that leadership could be effectively distributed. One Principal spoke of how:

> *'I've had to be very very hands on and very very visible and I've modelled a lot of approaches that I expect and I have been training my leadership team and other colleagues in what I've been up to so that I can pass it on to them to run. My challenge now is to free myself up to do things for other Academies, possibly to federate with another school and or primary partners. The team are young and they're dynamic and ambitious and they want to be headteachers so this is a great training ground for them and I am starting to be able to distribute the leadership so they get the experience.'*
> (Respondent 12)

Timing is also as important as who and how to distribute leadership as articulated by one respondent who explained how:

> *I need to put in place a team of staff that can actually run the school without me being here and I'm not that inclined to have a Head of School at the moment. I also not that inclined to have a Vice Principal at the moment because I actually quite like the fact that I have all the Assistant Principals doing different things and the school runs itself and as they grow in confidence they don't need me. I suppose that if I end up as an Executive Principal I might move to the point of having a Head of School but I'd need to get to that position and feel confident that the leadership is distributed effectively and securely and think it was the right thing to do for this Academy because at the moment I'm very instrumental in driving the thing on and I think they are still learning a lot from me.'*
> (Respondent 12)

Thus in this case the leadership is distributed at senior level yet amongst equals all reporting to the Principal and able to help to secure and sustain the Academy even without there being a full-time Principal on occasion in due course. This planned approach again, enables rapid development of leadership skills whilst also providing the opportunity for a new Principal to be appointed in due course with the momentum and direction of the school able to be kept on track through the well established distributed leadership mechanisms. One possible draw back

in the longer term of this structure is the reluctance of those Assistant Principals to move on to promoted positions in another organisation thus keeping a critical mass of original senior leaders in the one Academy who may lose the objectivity and flexibility to move the Academy to the next sage of its development when a new Principal is appointed.

Of all those Principals interviewed, there was an overriding commitment to the development of their staff to the point of being able to distribute aspects of leadership. This was accompanied by a strong awareness that they, as Principals, had ultimate responsibility and therefore would not embark on any distribution of leadership until they knew that the infrastructure was in place to support such action and ensure the sustainability and continued improvement of their Academy. Making the decision to distribute leadership and getting the timing to do so right was another factor which several of the Principals noted as a leadership challenge.
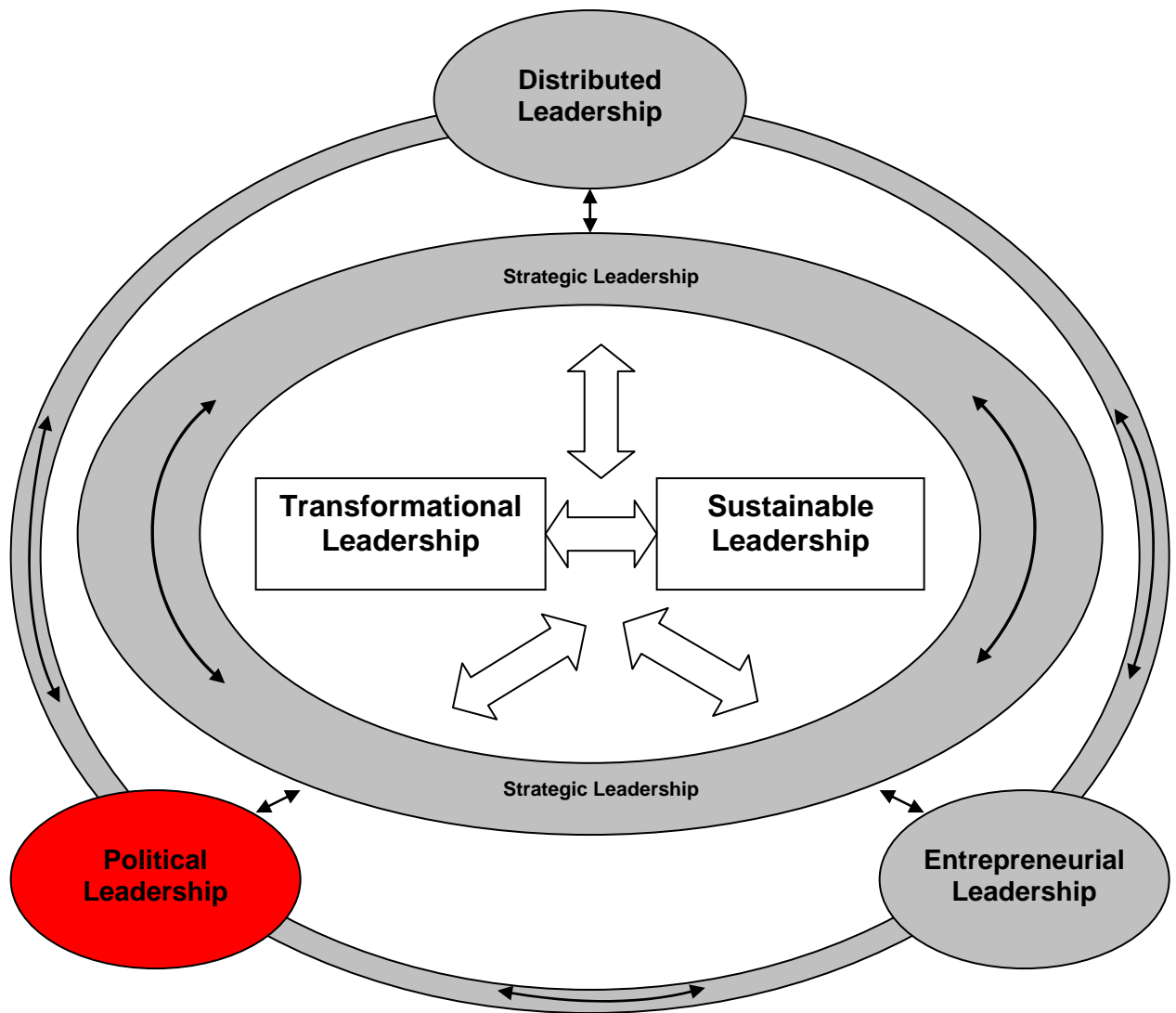
Figure 4.3d Political leadership as a dynamic element contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

From the interviews with Principals of Academies the traditional view of political manoeuvring as manipulative, dishonest and subsequently destructive is replaced by a realistic recognition and understanding that power and conflict are natural by-products of co-operative activity to secure improvement. This has its origins in the lessons brought forth by Machiavelli but any dimensions of political leadership requires familiarity with the strategies and tactics of power and conflict. All the Principals interviewed had a clear awareness and reasoned

understanding of the ways things stand in their locale and nationally. They were able to consolidate their power base both within and without the Academy, setting out a clear agenda to focus everyone on the direction and avoid any misdirection or loss of focus and they had all successfully managed to make a series of right moves, to the benefit of the organisation, at the right time. One respondent explained how:

> *'This is a very politically active environment, particularly the unions. This borough have an agenda of their own which doesn't seem akin to anything on the national arena regarding Academies. They peddle their stuff and it needs to be addressed otherwise people start to believe it and it's all inaccurate because they base it on rumour not reality, on lies but I have ears and eyes everywhere and spend a lot of time correcting the 'misunderstandings' which are manufactured by few but which impact on many. It is the death knell of the unions really in the UK but they're taking a long time to grow up and see that the country is a different place and is better for what has happened. They probably wonder where on earth I hear things from but that is part of my job, to protect the progress of the Academy and its community and dispel myth, rumour and lies.'*
> (Respondent 7)

Arguably the most outspoken opinion on the unions from this particular respondent, several other of the respondents made reference to similar experiences with some of the teaching unions and the amount of time they had spent on addressing issue which they believed the unions had raised to slow the progress of the Academy down. Not only the unions but also a broader public spotlight of the media was a recurring themes form several of the respondents with one commenting on how:

> *'The one major time consuming aspect which I wasn't used to previously was that, although you're still very much leading a learning community as an Academy Principal, you're dealing with it in a very public arena, both nationally and locally and the agendas are not the same for each so you have to be very sensitive to this context you're working in and this can be difficult for staff when things are misrepresented in the press. Now most just laugh at it and the media seem to be cooling their coverage.'*
> (Respondent 6)

Throughout the interviews the notion of both internal and external political dimensions sat hand in hand with the fact that each principal was leading under the microscope in that their job was undertaken in a climate of very close public scrutiny. Most reported the maturation of bodies such as the Academies Division in helping to publicise data nationally in a way which was unambiguous about the progress Academies had made and which therefore enabled Principals to use information as ammunition in any political context to strengthen the case and help inform decisions. Similarly, many Academy Principals have worked alongside local agencies, community groups and the press to befriend those who might be construed as enemies or obstructive. Three respondents commented on the ways in which leading under the spotlight of close public scrutiny impacted on their strategic and operational role as Principals:

> *'You certainly need a highly developed political sensitivity, even more than you know, which you need for a maintained school and a real awareness of national trends because you don't have the local authority protecting you.'*
> (Respondent 5)

> *'Even when there are some minor issues inside the Academy which would never even be voiced in a local authority school it comes to Ministerial notice very quickly and you need to respond very quickly. This is something that I think all Academy Principals are very astute about and take very seriously indeed.'*
> (Respondent 3)

> *'Previously the parents felt that the Academy wasn't accountable to anyone and so, rather than using the usual governance mechanisms that are in place, they used legal mechanisms including a judicial review. There were a number of different constituencies amongst the parents who felt they were excluded from the Academy so one of my first priorities was to get them in and give them an arena to air and resolve any conflicts they had and actually make them feel welcome. This prevented them from striking back behind the scenes and a much more positive culture has built up as a result'.*
> (Respondent 11)

Although the focus for each of these examples differs slightly, there is a common thread that each respondent as Principal of an Academy raises here and that is the need for acute awareness of the local political climate and how to both react and also manage it to the benefit of the Academy and its staff and student community.

A further factor which has developed during the period of the research is the change in local political party and national shadow leadership which has impacted directly on the way in which Academies are being viewed. The support of the Conservative Party under the leadership of David Cameron (speech by David Willetts, Conservative Party Shadow Education Secretary, 16.5.07 at the Confederation of British Industry conference) for an increase in Academies in line with that proposed by the Labour Government has changed the way many local authorities are viewing the Academies programme and their role in it. Furthermore, Gordon Brown's early announcement as Prime Minister (July 2007) of the removal of the previously conditional £2 million contribution by local authority and university sponsors in setting up an Academy, together with the Learning and Skills Council's requirement for all local authorities (LAs) to work in partnership with Academies in their LA as a condition in securing their funding from 2008 has brought forth a tide of operational change in the political dimensions for Academy leaders.

Several Academy Principals interviewed expressed their desire to work outside of a local authority arena with an even greater degree of autonomy than had been afforded them previously even as heads of Foundation schools:

'I've only ever worked in comprehensive state schools but I was becoming increasingly frustrated that I'd worked for years to try to get the system changed but I was increasingly aware that the system was not going to change, that it was not a level playing field as long as local authorities oversaw education. I was working with colleagues in a borough where they selected 45% of their students whilst I fought and fought to make it equal admissions. At the end of the day I thought, well if the system isn't going to change then I'll have to work within a different system and try to get equality for those students who deserve it so that's when I kind of threw my hat in with the Academies programme and its way of working.'
(Respondent 8)

In actively choosing to move into the Academies programme as a Principal the notion that it was the only option within state education if the exiting local authority *'system was not going to change, that it was not a level playing field as long as local authorities oversaw education'* a very public political comment is being made. However, the feeling that, as an Academy Principal one's own destiny can be carved out is not so positive here with the reference that *'if the system isn't going to change then I'll have to work within a different system'*. No mention is made of a better system, but just *'a different system'*, indeed a rather unknown and embryonic one at that. Yet the overriding positive in this is the commitment to *'try to get equality for those students who deserve it'* and it is this aspect that several of the respondents vocalised as part of their own tactic in dealing with the media and public attention.

The role of certain press in their coverage of Academies was also raised by many of the respondents. Generally at the time of interviewing most had established good relationships with the local press who chose to focus on the success of the students. However, a couple of the tabloid newspapers were mentioned as a cause of concern and damage and the need to draw on political skills to manage the impact on staff, students, parents and the immediate

local community who were in direct association with the Academy cited as important and timely attributes for Academy Principals to exert. One respondent emotionally recounted how:

> *'The Evening Standard a week ago said '£25 million academy fails inspection'. If you let things like this get to you then you know you can become paranoid. Other principals ring you up to offer support and, even though they've all seen it we're all in the same boat – it could be me today, you tomorrow. What I try to do now is treat the press with the contempt they deserve. I actually wrote a letter in response – they'll never publish it because that's not what they want. After that I saw my biggest task as supporting the staff you know and to say this doesn't reflect upon you, we're being used as a political football here.... But it's really hard personally and impacts on recruitment and hangs around for a long time because everything is taken out of context.'*
> (Respondent 4)

The emotions which run through this extract from the interview transcript reveal the level of frustration and even anger which recalling the experience still brings to the fore for this respondent. Although the respondent claims to '*treat the press with the contempt they deserve*' and energies were put into '*supporting the staff*', the level of personal bruising for this respondent appears to be quite overwhelming and the impact on the organisation of such press coverage '*impacts on recruitment and hangs around for a long time*' in the experience of this respondent. Not alone in this experience, another respondent explained how:

> *'I don't think I appreciated or anticipated the hostility that would come with being Principal of an Academy. I knew there was hostility to independent schools, and as an independent state school there was a lot of poor information around at the start which meant people didn't understand, so when I started here some of my staff had a really hostile reception when they went to conferences or to local meetings and I had to look at how to train them to deal with that. It has all gone quiet lately because of the expansion of the programme nationally I think – people know it isn't going to go away and these schools are making a huge improvement on the predecessor schools and so the press, the unions and the local councils have no ammunition – we have it!'*
> (Respondent 1)

Interestingly in this case the focus is not so much on the press *per se* but on hostility from a range of sources, the explanation being of misinformation rather than on the more malicious intent as implied by the previous quotation. Nevertheless, both respondents saw the need to support and indeed protect their staff as a key action in these contexts. Machiavelli concluded that 'in politics, whether an action is good or evil can only be decided in the light of what it is meant to achieve and whether it successfully achieves it' (Bull, 1995, p. xx). This implies that politics always operates in a context of values and, through challenging the social injustice and established values of England together with the comments, experiences and observations from Principals of those very schools, it can be seen that elements of political leadership come into play to secure the improvement which Academy Principals are challenged to achieve.
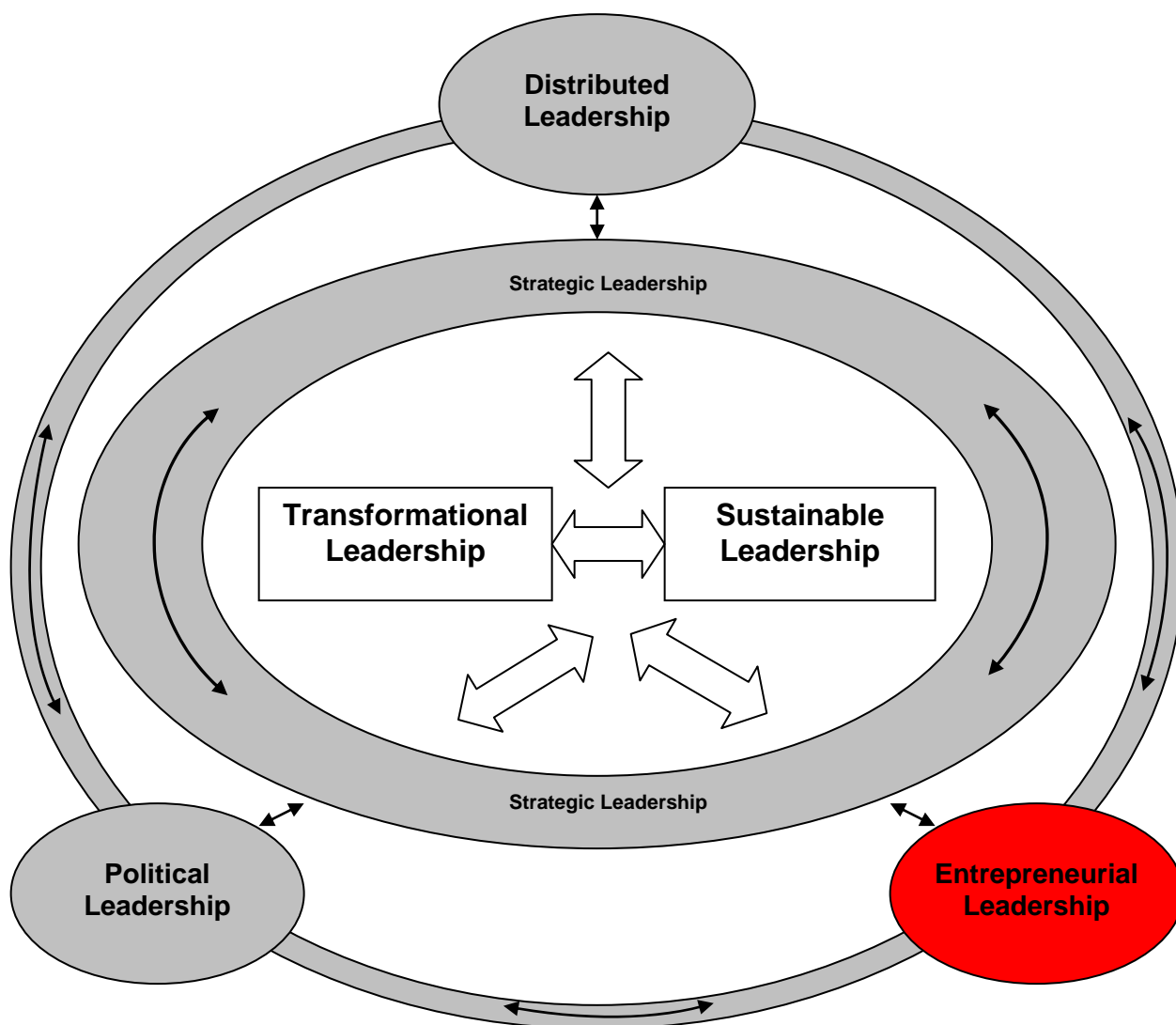
Figure 4.3e Entrepreneurial leadership as a dynamic element contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

Wood, Wood and Gunter (2006), in their study of 37 open Academies, note that 'academies are predominantly being constructed as sites intended to enhance the growing influence of private versions of entrepreneurialism.' (2006, p.1) The creation of the Academies programme in England with a focus on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial risk taking, not to mention generation of additional income where possible for the school, has created a demand for a different type of leadership skill set of which entrepreneurship is one option.

Examples of individual Academy sponsors engaging in social entrepreneurialism are evident in the Academies programme. The multiple emphases on community welfare, responsiveness to and involvement of local people, working to improve the environment, participation in local regeneration and co-operation with other agencies, resonate with a commitment to the public ethos. In act it might be more accurate to claim that sponsors and stakeholders through their Principals are, arguably, taking the opportunity to develop a different kind of schooling with the greater good of the local community at its heart, and thus acting in an entrepreneurial fashion which aspire to meeting some of the complex aims in advancing the public good through the Academies programme. The aspect of sponsor impact comes to the fore in the analysis and discussion of this leadership dimension in the dynamic model and the respondent responses from the interviews highlight some notable challenges for Academy Principals. Notably three of the respondents recounted how:

> *'I was once described in an Ofsted inspection report as an entrepreneurial Head Teacher which I never knew what it was really. But I recognise it now. I have definitely become... the term Chief Executive ... is more appropriate to me now than ever it would have been two years ago. I know so much more about things in a business context, in a personnel development context, in the context of our place in a wider community, our links to business and all of that. I've definitely developed skills that didn't exist before, or they certainly weren't developed in me before. So I think I've become a lot more entrepreneurial and my sponsor has been the mentor behind it all although he wouldn't be aware that he was.'*
> (Respondent 2)

> *'I have learnt to acquire an entrepreneurial attitude from the governors and our sponsor. You see we need more space, to extend our building. The sponsor's position is 'Right, let's get down to doing the master plan, let's work out how we will do it, how we will finance it then we can present it to the Academies Division'. It's all about 'can dos' not 'Oh my goodness we can't do that for another five years'. I think the whole emphasis on rewarding performance of staff and students is also entrepreneurial in the way they do it and everyone likes it.'*
> (Respondent 3)

'What my sponsor brings to the Academy is an outward looking perspective and a confident expectation that what he does can and should succeed. There is a genuine hunger and an expectation for success. This is what these kind of people are used to in business which is why they are so successful themselves. They know you can't do it on your own so they look to get good people on the governing body to help and contribute so, you know, we've got significant people from the world of sport and the arts as well as people with serious business and project management experience and I learn from all of this and have become more entrepreneurial in my approach as a result.'
(Respondent 8)

Whether each of these respondents in fact had a predisposition to entrepreneurial activities and ways of thinking prior to their leadership of Academies is not easy to ascertain. However, what is clear is that the sponsors recognised a potential in them and the relationship once in post between sponsor and Principal enable the nurturing and allowed the freedom and indeed permission for entrepreneurship to develop and flourish. The opportunity afforded these Academy Principals through the relationship with their sponsors which are not part of the structures in the maintained sector an any formal level have evidently impacted on the way in which they operate as leaders in some respects.

In the entrepreneurial realm tremendous time and energy is invested in building strategic alliances to strengthen and grow the organisation and it is this which the involvement of sponsors in setting up Academies distinguishes their position from being one of reliance on the status quo to having the connections to do things differently and to have control over how it is done and why it is done, albeit with the educational input and expertise of the Principals which they report as being a strength in the development of their relationship with the sponsor. As one respondent stated:

'All four of my sponsors are very successful businessmen in their own right but have a passion for sport and what it can do for people. That's how this whole project was born. So I came here to this amazingly rich number of contacts, which I was determined to use not just for buying a minibus sort of thing but to actually make the students' experiences of education different. If you don't like that kind of outreach work which is quite entrepreneurial then you couldn't make good use of your sponsors, at least not mine anyway.'
(Respondent 2)

Although unusual in the sense that most Academies have only one or two sponsors unlike the four referred to here, the advantages of having several sponsors can also be seen in terms of the fair competition which entrepreneurs often bring to all aspects of their work with the result that the Academy will benefit from this level of friendly and business-like one-upmanship. More than one sponsor can also help share the load and widen the net of contacts as another respondent explained:

'I like the way my sponsors work. They bring huge positive links with all sorts of businesses that they've got contacts with and they are quite competitive actually with one another to see who can do best for the Academy. This means, for example, that our Year 10's went on work experience placements completely different from the ones they've gone on before in the predecessor school and they are quite fantastic placements.'
(Respondent 6)

One common factor of all sponsors referred to by the respondents was the fact that they like, want and need to be successful and therefore will do whatever they can to help the Academy be successful. They want to work and be associated with others who are successful and want to develop successful leaders within their own organisations. They are also able to recognise the potential for successful entrepreneurs. Guilbert Hentschke (2005) considers that entrepreneurial leaders in education distinguish themselves by a number of characteristics. These include financial management skills (including, significantly, raising capital), personal

motivation, a 'can do attitude' in terms of a passionate commitment to action, a tolerance of risk, and a mind set of 'where others saw problems they saw opportunities'. It is important to consider the ways and extent to which these ideas play out in the research conversations with the Academy Principals.

To a considerable extent entrepreneurial activity often has a degree of risk attached. Certainly offering to sponsor a failing school as any of the first Academies were in their predecessor forms is not only high risk but also publicly high risk in terms of media attention and political pressure and scrutiny from all sides. Those individual sponsors or groups of sponsors who helped to establish the Academies which the twelve respondents in this study lead are all reported as being passionate about the schools even if some are more directly involved in the governance of it than others. The Principals also agree that they have learnt a degree of business and commercial entrepreneurship from working with their sponsors and governing bodies and that this, in turn, has brought some form of enrichment to the school and its students and staff as a result. As one Principal was eager to stress:

> *'My sponsor takes great pride in the fact that we're doing well. He tries to get as much money for the school as possible which benefits the children directly, so he's got a good range of business contacts who earn good money. He's also very good at approaching the DfES and saying 'why isn't this happening?' I prompt him sometimes like an Exocet missile at the Academies Division and he always seems to get them to come up with the goods. I now have the confidence to do a little of that too off the back of the inroads he has made for us here.'*
> (Respondent 9)

And this was a similar pattern from other respondents:

'I think we're incredibly lucky with the sponsor we've got because he knows when to get involved and when not to get involved and his interest and passion for us doing well is there without him overcrowding us. I have learnt a lot from him He's obviously a very cleaver and astute businessman who has run a global company, but is also generating the local area. He's alert and likes things done properly. He actually wants people to learn the right ways of treating each other and doing things. He brings time that he puts into the job, he brings the connections within this area that he has, he unlocks the door through the County Council and the District Council for us because they want to work with him, he brings expertise in terms of leadership and management and he brings a confidence because people see him as someone who's very successful and so why wouldn't we be successful by association. As a result I have leant some of the skills which I guess you could say are purely entrepreneurial but also enterprising by watching him in operation so I can replicate them for the school also.'
(Respondent 12)

This common theme of key skills which the respondents have gained both awareness and understanding of through their sponsors is a powerful voice throughout the interviews and cannot be underestimated. It continues further:

'He's a successful businessman, but what he brings is passion and commitment and there's no doubt he does that. He brings a business acumen which we benefit from. He brings active support and challenge and we take risks to make things happen but he's shown me how to make them calculated so that any loss would be minimal and easily recouped.'
(Respondent 7)

'Although the sponsor and the governing body come with a lower level of awareness about technicalities of education, their level of questioning is actually much higher because these people come with a degree of confidence and they also understand, because they've bought into the vision of what the place is all about, because that's why they became sponsors... their confidence and their desire to realise that vision actually marry up and they come in and do the business when they are asked for their support. The same way as they treat any of their companies to ensure they are successful. So where we need PR we go and talk to one of them, where we need to have a slightly better understanding of business or charity networks we talk to other ones. They want to know the place is in the black, that we're giving the kids a good deal, that the students and staff are happy, they change it and they are still robust and I have adopted much of their method as a result to make this place fly.'
(Respondent 6)

This support and professional learning and entrepreneurship through partnership of sponsor with Academy and Principal has helped to create, in some respects Academies as being hybrid organisations in which entrepreneurial imperatives can flourish. By combining characteristics of the private sector, such as being 'independently managed', 'promoted… by independent sponsors' (DfES, 2004, p.51) and free to innovate, with public sector characteristics, such as dependence on Government funding and expectations to contribute to social goals by tackling educational inequalities and contributing to the regeneration of communities, a new leadership typology is evolving and with it the need for leadership to respond to the model and challenges, something which leadership of Academies as evidenced here has been quick to see the benefits of and seize.

4.4   Strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes

One of the key questions put to all respondents regarded the balance between their strategic and operational role. Through this it was possible to tease out what those Academy Principals interviewed felt were the strategic imperatives and priorities to leading an Academy to successful outcomes in the first three years.

There is a concept of the 'life cycle' of a school. This is where previous poor or underperformance goes through states from improving, to satisfactory, to good, to outstanding. To move through the first stage of improving to satisfactory, there is a tendency to believe that a strong operational and organisational focus is needed. While this is correct it should not be seen in isolation from the later stages of good and outstanding.

Davies (2006) uses the concept of 'sequential' and 'parallel' leaders. Sequential leaders undertake and complete the operational necessities of organisational development and when they are in place and working they move onto to considering what strategic agendas need to be addressed. In brief they do the operational before the strategic. Parallel leaders do both concurrently. They recognise the operational imperatives and get on and address them but at the same time they link them to the longer term strategic objectives of the school. They use the strategic objectives as a template to develop and asses the operational activities.
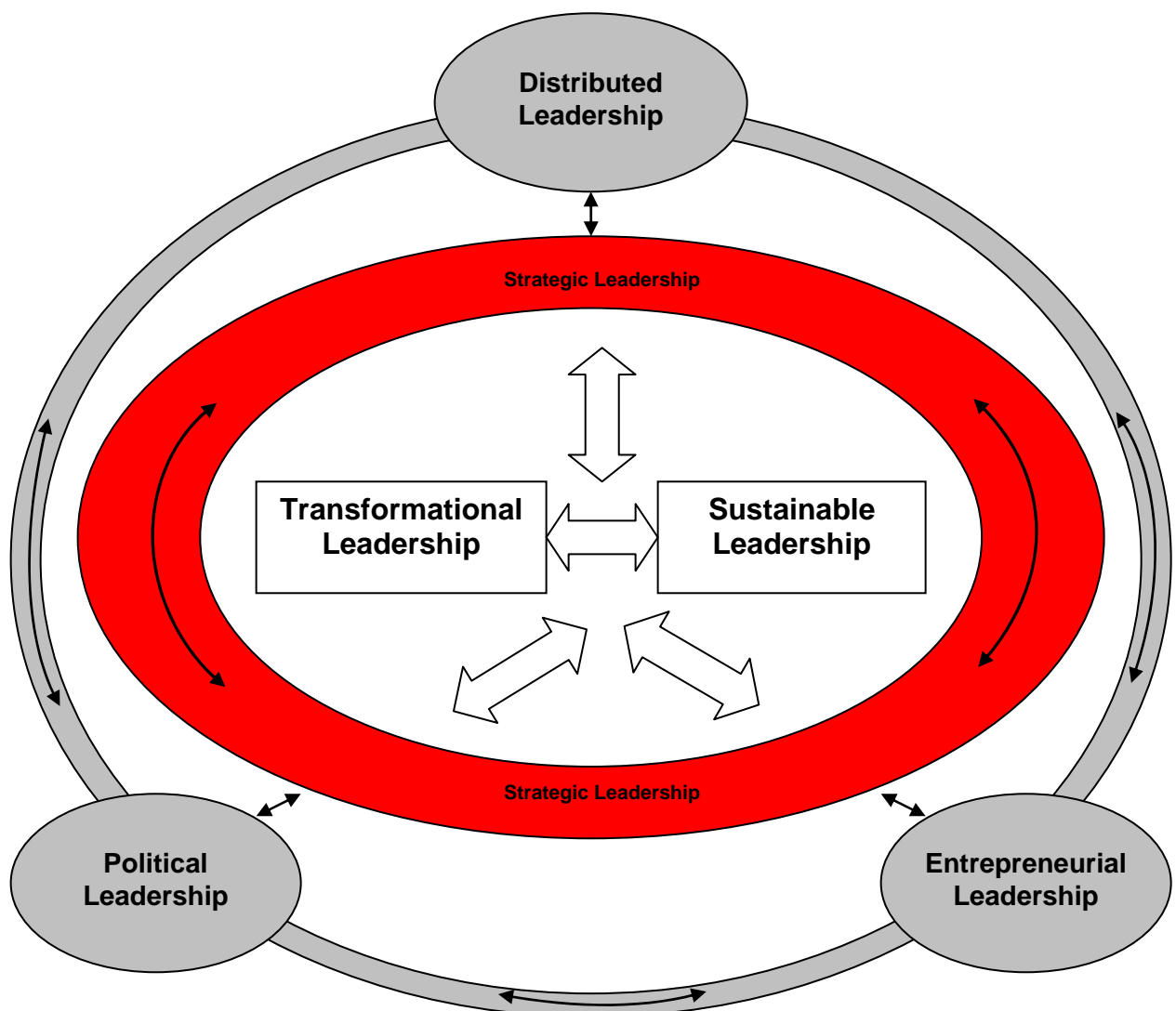
Figure 4.4 Strategic leadership as a dynamic element contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

Nearly every response began with a statement along the lines of *'it depends on the issue as to the degree of strategy required and how much of your time is taken up with operational stuff.'* (Respondent 6).

One respondent's explanation or illustration of the balance between their strategic and operation role was:

> *'One thing we're looking at at the moment is developing a vocational centre and one has to operate strategically to do that... to have the kind of vision to make things happen, to look where it's going to happen, to work with the politicians in the area and the communities in the area to make it work. But you also have to have the day to day understanding of the fact that the finances have to be in place etc and then work strategically to allocate them to make sure the project is cost effective. In general terms, as an Academy you need to be more strategically aware because you are effectively working independently in a Local Authority who often don't want you to exits and with a local community who is just getting to grips with what you are about.'*
> (Respondent 6)

This very specific and clearly identified example illustrates the extent to which the elements of political and entrepreneurial leadership come into play almost inextricably with that if the strategic and operational imperatives of Academy leadership with a seamless fluidity. With most respondents, the need to be operational at the start then move towards a more strategic outlook as transformation was realised and sustainability became a clearly defined phase of organisational development, so too did the balance of strategic start and indeed need to become more explicit. One respondent explained how:

> *'I've insisted that my role become more strategic and I've appointed people who can be operational to enable that to happen. During the day I'm planning, I'm pushing, I'm trying to be strategic, but you know if I'm honest most of my strategic thinking is away from here, in the evenings; that's when the real work starts if you like, but I'm trying to train people into being strategic during the day every day*

without fail otherwise they'll never get it right and we'll all just keep doing operational things and the place won't move forward.'
(Respondent 8)

What appears to be implied here at the start is the idea that when leadership starts to operate in a strategic way *'that's when the real work starts'*. This comment suggests that the operational work during the school day is not assessed as being 'real work' by this respondent in the sense that leadership is a strategic activity that cannot be undertaken when others are around but needs to be done in isolation after hours. There is a recognition, however, towards the end of the comment of a need to involve others and provide them with the opportunity to think and understand what being strategic is and how it can benefit the organisation to move forward.

In contrast, one respondent spoke enthusiastically of the importance of working strategically and involving others in working this way on a daily basis:

> *'It's an amazing balancing act but working on strategically developing this school is actually what fuels me, like an adrenalin rush. My senior team say it drives them mad when I have a strategic rush… but what I have been doing is working out how to go about things having identified what needs to be the next stage. I then have to see how to make it work and which people would be best suited to helping realise it. Once I've done that it's amazing how fired up it makes people too and we all work strategically and integrate it with the operational imperatives of running this place.'*
> (Respondent 3)

It is recognised that these two respondents were at different stages in the development of their Academies and in the move from transformation towards sustainability and, as such, Respondent 3 was in a position to operate more freely in a strategic arena for a greater part of the day since the *'operational imperatives'* which are referred to had been established.

Another factor which was cited as important for several of those interviewed was the fact that they had to work strategically on building alliances with key staff in order to change the culture and ethos inherited from a failing predecessor school which was entrenched in the attitudes of some of the staff. One respondent explained how:

> *'Strategically working out who I needed to get on side quickly was important. We had an outstanding teacher of art, just a superb teacher, and she was one of the people who immediately I formed an alliance with and she was very sort of emblematic of the young staff wanting different direction in terms of the Academy so I seized the chance to develop that.'*
> (Respondent 11)

This respondent went on to explain how forming this strategic alliance was in turn linked to an increase in the popularity of the school as a place to work in. Respondents answers suggested that the more effective the strategic alliances within the staff to bring about improvement and change, the more likely the reputation of the school was going to attract people from outside to positions in the Academy. As one respondent stated:

> *'The strategic priority and focus at present is to grow our student numbers at the rate we are and maintain them so that we can function in an economically viable way and then be able to fund the other strategic initiatives we have ready to launch. Without the funds we can't do anything so we have a real strategic drive on that.'*
> (Respondent 4)

Ensuring student numbers are filled is a key strategic activity in a climate where there is competition for school places and also where there may be factors which may make a school less popular than those around them. Just as important is the need for careful strategic succession planning for senior leaders to ensure the sustainability of the organisation. This was of key concern to one respondent who explained how:

'I have been having a lot of discussions with the Chair of Governors about the sustainability of leadership here and succession planning. It has been very strategic because they need to make sure they have a good person in place when I retire and that really does require strategic planning. The foresight and ability to try to predict what the Academy needs in its next phase of leadership is incredibly strategic.'
(Respondent 7)

In the model the ribbon in which 'Strategic Leadership' sits by way of an 'inner atmosphere' is symbolic of the energy and dynamic movement which binds the organisation together at its heart, drawing in its component parts at various times towards the core or periphery depending upon what is required during the process of transformation and sustainability. For an organisation to continue to operate successfully such strategic conversations as the Respondent 7 has had with the Chair of Governors are an essential part of forward planning and quality assurance monitoring or health checks both for the immediate and the future of the Academy and signal effective, proactive leadership in action.

There is always the danger of looking to short term fixes and not building long-term sustainability in to the school. One of the underlying issues which became ever more apparent as the research progressed was the underlying question of whether a leader can be strategic when the sort term demands are so great, yet this is critical for the long term success of Academies as those interviews articulated. One responded expressed how:

'Getting the strategic and operational balance right is crucial. I think that was partly the problem with the predecessor school... they were totally operational, they were so hands on that they couldn't actually formulate a plan and that's still something I'm having a problem with some of the staff from the old school. Some of them still don't understand that actually long term planning will make us a better place than just being out in the corridor reacting. I have a separate

strategic and a separate operational meeting now to really hammer home the difference and the importance so they can see it.'
(Respondent 8)

In this example the issue of leadership being able to see over and beyond the operational demands and also ensuring that others in fact take on a good share of many of those demands on a day to day basis rather than relying on the Principal to literally walk the corridors for hours on end is important. By separating leadership team meetings into 'strategic' and 'operational' to demonstrate the difference, a further coaching model has been established and the opportunity for further distributed leadership on both an operational and strategic level may be possible.

In assessing the more immediate strategic priorities of the respondents, it is clear that each Principal interviewed was committed to a belief and realisation that strategy needs to secure a longer term position in terms of success and that, having worked to transform a school, it is the sustainability of it and development to the next stage which only strategic ideas and actions can help formulate and cement. One particular example recounted by a respondent told of how:

> *'We spent quite a lot of time last year developing a five year strategy and we've gone a certain way along the line to developing a balanced score card with which to monitor it. It's really based on the balanced score card way of thinking born in equal concern for the customers, the people, the processes and the money. That's how we've constructed our strategic long-term vision and we know that's how the top global companies work and more people in local government are adopting that style of strategic planning. Of course there are phases within it, but that's the basis for our strategic intent.'*
> (Respondent 3)

By drawing on the strategies and techniques of organisations outside education such as *'top global companies'* there is also the greater credibility for longer-term strategic planning with the view that such organisations have a lot to lose so schools school align themselves with them because they too have a lot to lose in that their children and young people only get one chance to get it right and succeed.

Getting the timing right for introducing strategic processes has been an important factor for many of the Academy Principals who expressed in general terms the fine balancing act of getting people on side whilst ensuring that movement forwards is maintained and not entrenched in purely day to day operational matters. Modelling this way of working has also been central to the success of those Principals interviewed. Several expressed similar responses from colleagues employed from predecessor schools who believed that *'walking around the corridors all day long telling children off means you're doing a proper job as a Principal. It's a major mind set I've had to change and show them what will really work for this place.'* (Respondent 8)

All of the respondents displayed a relentless energy at challenging the status quo so that their Academy can continue to improve and perform better in the future. The constant questioning of why things are done the way they are, how they should be done and the close focus on outcomes ensures a momentum and energy about the leadership and much of its following for these Principals. Interestingly, those questioned all showed themselves to be active learners in the process themselves, in strategically positioning themselves to be able to utilise strategic dimensions rather than become entrenched in purely operational or technical demands of the

job. Although important, arguably such technical and operational aspects cannot provide the long term direction for the organisation but, rather, act as more of an infrastructure. It is these technical and operational dimensions specific to Academies and their roles in the success of such schools which will now be examined in light of the research findings.

4.5 Technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies

> *'I must be one of the highest paid lunchtime supervisors in the country – but it needs to happen at the moment.'*
> (Respondent 7)

Balancing the technical and operational demands of leading any organisation with the other elements as listed in the dynamic model are brought sharply into focus when considering the role of an Academy Principal who, unlike the CEO or COO of a large organisation, is by the nature of the role more visible to everyone in the organisation on a daily basis. What is interesting from the respondents is the stage at which they feel their operational and technical roles and function is secure and which they can delegate or distribute. There seems to be no one-size-fits-all version for those Academies in the sample despite them all being at a similar stage in terms of length of time open. Their challenges have been different in many respects but the skills required to deal with them similar as all were operating in challenging socio-economic contexts with a legacy of severe underperformance and low aspiration. The operational dimensions also seem to fall into the day to day running of the Academy and those relating to working with the Sponsor and/or Governing Body. The same is true of the technical dimensions whereby the Academy Governing Body, many of whose members may also be Directors and Trustees of the Academy, may fulfil aspects of a technical nature which Local

Authorities may have fulfilled for maintained schools or which may not been a requirement in other types of schools. An early example cited by one Principal was the issue of getting the Academy insured:

> *'We had no bargaining power at the start because there weren't enough of us. Nobody would insure the Academy apart from Zurich Mutual. The DfES said we'd get the money for the insurance but because we had to negotiate it individually it was actually going to cost us four time as much and so we had to ask them for an extra grant. This was not good use of public money in the early days. Now we have buying power because there are so many more Academies. I learnt a lot about this kind of things which I never had to think about as a head in a local authority school but it is good to know these things I think. It has made me far more business aware and the sponsors helped a lot.'*
> (Respondent 1)

> *'...and then there's the VAT issue and lots of things that we have to think about. We have this fantastic building but we can't use it after 6 p.m. because we're on such a tight site that we are only allowed to use ten per cent for community use after hours and our ten per cent is the size of a toilet block - useless!'*
> (Respondent 9)

Pressure from Academy Principals and Sponsors and their Governing Bodies over the two years has helped to address some of the technical obstacles with the VAT regulations for use after hours being removed and these, in turn, have led to a marked increase in community involvement in the Academy through use of sport and learning facilities late into the evenings and during weekends and holidays. Respondents reported the benefits to their Academies through the opening up of access and usage and with it a greatly improved perception from the local community and indeed the local press about the work of the Academy as a result.

Technical dimensions cited by respondents were generally those relating to financial matters and legal issues linked to the independent status of the Academy:

'It's really very technical compared to when I was head of a borough maintained school. Take for example the fact that we have to set up as a company. I know the liability is only one pound but if people don't understand the importance and implications of what being a company director brings with it they could be disbarred from being directors of every other company. You know all of this is very serious and I think that Principals need to make sure they understand all of that and their governors need to know too. There are risks in everything but we have a responsibility to make people aware and heads traditionally didn't have to know any of this.'
(Respondent 3)

'I think we're very fortunate that we have the sponsors we have because they have several hundred years experience dealing with buildings, legal issues, lettings and leases and all of that so when we need help we just ring up the right department in the Corporation and they are able to give us first class, reliable advice and it doesn't cost us. I don't think other Academies have that luxury and it certainly makes us technically secure. The Academies Division are now much more on the ball for other Academies I hear but it wasn't like that at the start and Principals were asking for help left right and centre and were never sure if it was the best advice they were being given.'
(Respondent 1)

It is also important to distinguish between those Academies which opened in 2002 and 2003 taking some of the staff and the majority of the students from the predecessor schools with them and those who were brand new start up schools with only one from of Year 7 entry. The technical and indeed operational demands upon these different stage starts of Academies have also had notably different demands both in terms of their technical and operational pressures. As one Principal, experienced in leading both new start and re-starting schools, said:

'Now I'm sure that if you're starting a new school up from scratch with a Year Seven, no history, no predecessor school, you can get very excited about meals, uniform, grant maintenance and all those things you have to deal with. But when you've got all that plus you've got 1,000 children already, a building programme mid-way through on your site at a time with real pressures to improve, it presents quite different issues in terms of both daily and longer term operational priorities and it is the loneliest job I've ever had in that respect. You really have to draw on incredible inner strength and it tests your capacity to the limit.'
(Respondent 7)

This context in which Academies are operating and the fact that they are not all borne from the same origins is crucial in assessing the leadership challenges. Although various and differing at the key points of inception of an Academy, there is nevertheless a point after approximately three years in operation, the point at which the twelve respondents in this research sample were interviewed, where a levelling out of challenges provides an opportunity for comparison as has been the case in this study.

The speed at which the Academies Programme was launched also meant that support systems at central level were evolving at the same time the school buildings were going up and indeed Academies opening. There was no prior establishment of an experienced team to guide new Principals and their Governing Bodies on some crucial aspects of technical importance so, amidst a high level of public scrutiny any errors in judgement through this lack of experience made were open to gross magnification. This situation has now been addressed and welcomed by Principals as one respondent expressed in some detail:

> *'The establishment of the DfES Academies Advisors Unit is very welcome. It's important and long overdue and they've got some good people in there. I also have evidence that the DfES projects are now much better led now that they have a few Academies under their belt. Like us they have learnt from their mistakes. The DfES has been on a learning curve itself. In the past the Local Authorities knew what they were supposed to do, but the DfES have had to learn that and they are a much greater help on both technical and operational matter now than three years ago when it all started.'*
> (Respondent 2)

The increase in the number of Academies coming online and at the speed with which they are doing so means that Academy Principals Designate and new Academy Principals will have a greater opportunity to benefit from the experience of an establish team at the now DCSF

Academies Division and also from other experienced Academy Principals. Furthermore, the technical understanding of Governing Bodies has been an important developmental factor for many of those interviewed. With the majority coming from a community and business background there has been a need to develop their experience in areas relating to issues such as student exclusions and Special Educational Needs so that they can discharge their duties effectively. In many respects this is arguably no different from members of maintained school Governing Bodies, but the high concentration of business membership of Academy Governing Bodies also puts time pressures on meetings and composition of sub committees. These operational structures mean that most Academy Governing Bodies, in contrast to the several which maintained schools typically have, only have three or four sub groups more generally tasked to deal with Curriculum/Education (often incorporating SEN and student discipline), Finance/Buildings, Human Resources/Staffing and termed accordingly. One respondent explained how:

> *'Many of the Governors come from a business and commercial background so although they are far more aware and can grasp things such as the technicalities of the Funding Agreement quickly and all the legal things they are not familiar with things like managed moves and exclusions so I help them get to grips with the education side of things and they make me aware of the other legal, contractual and financial technicalities which I am less familiar with. Having a really good Finance Director is also a must and I've learnt so much from him. He's got a background in the City and is also our Company Secretary.'*
> (Respondent 4)

The relationship described here is strengthened through the very specific business and commercial skills and knowledge which the sponsor representatives bring to the governing body of the Academy. This opportunity for sharing and learning from one another is more

business like than is typical of local authority maintained schools and further increases the accountability of both the Principal and also the Governing Body of the Academy.

The technical dimensions which three of the respondents raised specifically relating to finance also stressed the importance of commercial and professional expertise of a Finance Director in contrast to the lower level of Bursar which Local Authority schools tend to employ. The cost of employing someone of this level with the professional qualifications and experience is considerable but the Principals interviewed were clear that this was a key role and money well appropriated:

> *'There are the legal and fiduciary responsibilities that sit on us as limited companies and charities and which if we muck up could come back and haunt us quite badly. Just because you've been a successful head you not might not have the experience or be good at recognising and understanding these things so it is essential to have a really first class Director of Finance or Finance Director depending on the structure of your Board who would probably also be your Company Secretary so the technical detail would be right and the Academy protected.'*
> (Respondent 3)

Several of the respondents talked of the high level of focus at Governing Body meetings which was aligned to making the operational side of their work very business like and efficient whilst them still showing an interest in that side of the Academy:

> *'There is definitely much more focus in the meeting to be business like and structured, even if we are dealing with operational issues which I have brought to the table. I mean we may have the key issue identified, what they want to know are the key issues, give us the exact details of what you plan to do about it, what are your expected outcomes, come back next time and tell us how tings are running how and who the key players were in helping get it running well. The focus is really sharp, no time wasting and basically the final bit is totally delegated to me anyway but I now I need to deliver and well.'*
> (Respondent 2)

'In the end I am the Chief Operating Officer, or whatever you want to call it. It's very clear that the Governors/Directors and Trustees' responsibilities stop with the appointment of me and the Vice Principals. Everything from then on in terms of management and accountability and everything operational is delegated to me so I have sole operational responsibility but I do keep them informed, not least because they have a real interest and can't be here every day to see it in action. It's like a small child growing up – you see huge changes even after a couple of months away.'
(Respondent 3)

In relation to this there was, in term of a day-to-day basis, mixed opinion from the respondents as to the extent to which they should personally be involved operationally but this was also reflected in the stage of progress and stability the Academy was at. One respondent explained how:

'At the start there were just ten of us all leading a subject like Heads of Faculty and teaching and doing everything. It was quite hard in those portacabins – everyone knew what everyone else was doing all the time which is no bad thing but you never got thinking time as a Principal because everyone was so incredibly accessible. I was totally operational for nearly two years and only now that we've moved into the building can I start to step back and look at things and be more strategic and less directly operational. The staff manage their areas now and it runs really well but I think I needed to be very hands on to show how it was to be done when we finally moved into this building two years down the line. It has certainly paid off but I still walk the corridors, go into lessons and talk to the staff and students about what they are learning and why, go down to the Restaurant and see how things are running and also lead assemblies with the rest of the team. It's important not to lose sight of the operational, the cleaning etc. I site walk once a week with the Premises Manager to make my expectations clear and they value it'
(Respondent 1)

'I've been head here for a very ling time in the predecessor school also and so we were running almost a proto-Academy before we actually became one. This put us further down the line than others and the key systematic issue is that you need to appoint a lead deputy Principal and that's what I've done. This is the Associate Principal and I can't do what I need to do unless that kind of position is there to oversee the daily operational aspects while I deal with the politicians, the funding issues, the building and the key strategy demands. I see fewer kids these days than

I used to but I can't do everything and I always get a thorough update at the end of busy days on what's been happening on the ground.'
(Respondent 6)

One of the interesting issues raised by these two respondents is the fact that operational seems to equate with being seen to be doing things, to be visible around the school whilst the need to be more strategic as the Academy settles seem to bring with it a reduction in visibility and contact with the children. Whether this is real or perceived either by other staff or the respondents themselves, it nevertheless raises a point worth considering: what extent should an Academy Principal have in terms of their public visibility at various stages of development of the school both in terms of the daily operational activities inside the building and with the wider community and contracted with the balance of strategic demands. This in itself would provide opportunity for further independent research.

The independence of the Academy from the Local Authority also crates a further dimension in terms of geographical proximity for technical support and advice. Although most respondents said that their operational roles during the working day were similar to that in their time leading maintained schools the key differences lie in the distancing from the Local Authority as an independent school:

'In terms of finance and administration we are completely isolated from the Local Authority ways of working and we are the only Academy in the area so we have to rely on the Academies Division or I can ring up another Principal. It's better in the majority of instances not being connected with the Authority but it is also quite an isolated position if you need a quick answer to anything of substance which might have repercussions if I make a wrong decision myself. The reality is that when you do get advice it is very very good, totally reliable and generally in writing so everyone is covered. The one thing I miss is the day to day dialogue which you don't get with other Principals if you run an Academy so the operational decisions are yours and yours alone and the technical insight you get

through having to find out how things work is much higher. I guess I feel more informed and ultimately accountable as a result.'
(Respondent 5)

It is this balancing of technical and operational dimensions with an often enhanced need to be more adequately versed in financial and legal matters as a school with independent status that places Academy Principals in a position of greater leadership autonomy than many suggest they had experienced when running schools under the auspices of a Local Authority. The degree to which such leadership autonomy is felt by the respondents and whether it in fact contributes to pace and direction of progress for an Academy will now be examined.

4.6 Degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress

Leadership autonomy can be viewed both in terms of the autonomy or freedom to lead the organisation with full delegated responsibility and accountability in terms of the internal functions. However it can also be seen as enabling freedom to pursue external opportunities for the benefit of the organisation and its community which may be more constrained in a non-independent governing context than that which Academies are afforded. With autonomy comes risk in the sense that the freedom to lead is entrusted to the leader but checks and clear awareness of responsibility and accountability both by the leader and those entrusting the accountability need to be established from the outset. The level of demonstrable previous successful leadership experience of the twelve respondents in the study may well have contributed to their appointment to the posts of Principal of their Academy but the relatively new context in which they operate as leaders of independent schools with a high level of leadership autonomy is one factor that all respondents raised during the interviews, often in

relation to the pace at which they can make decisions, act and subsequently effect change for their school. Two of the respondents explained their experiences as the first person appointed to the Academy:

> *'I am the first Principal of a brand new school and so I have had the luxury of setting absolutely everything. Everything that has been put in place has been my responsibility and so if it doesn't work it's also my responsibility and I'd have some serious explaining to do. I was appointed to do just that – to set up a new school and so far it seems to be working well and it means things can run like a very well-oiled machine with no legacy of rusty parts which jam and slow things down. The Governors view my role very much as the person who ultimately leads what happens here. They test and question because they have a duty to but I have the autonomy and am both Principal and Chief Executive and it does mean that I can give answers to staff, to the DfES and so on without having to wait to consult with the Governors which always used to slow things down so much when I was a head before.'*
> (Respondent 10)

> *'If you take it from the very start when I was the only person who had been appointed to the Academy and I told the Governors what I was going to do for the school, I wrote the development plan and we talked and had training sessions and they actually said they thought it was an excellent plan that was realistic and that they would support everything I needed to do to realise it. This is what they have done ever since and they leave me to run the place, making sure I deliver on what I said I would do. I'm sure that if they thought I was screwing things up they would actually with no hesitation at all, you know, boom! You don't get the responsibility to run the show and then mess it up for them do you. But the place is heavily oversubscribed, it's popular with parents and we have no problem getting good staff who stay so now I just need to make sure that the first set of results, the SATs this year, are well above where they would be if these kids were in a regular local school. If I've done that then the autonomy I have been given to do things the way we need to do them here and not the way some Local Authority tells us we have to do it has clearly paid off.'*
> (Respondent 1)

Both respondents make it clear here that, with a huge level of delegated autonomy comes responsibility in equal measure. The rewards as a leader are expressed here as tremendous, not just personal rewards but the success of the organisation in being able to make decisions for

the benefit of the organisation and to do so quickly so that momentum in progress is maintained and staff and children alike feel the impetus. Also the ability for someone designated as '*Principal and Chief Executive …does mean that* [they] *can give answers to staff, to the DfES and so on without having to wait to consult with the Governors'* so staff, parents and students really understand where the final responsibility lies and with it the credibility that comes with that responsibility.

With Academy status comes not only the opportunity for high level leadership autonomy but also the independent status which provides Academies, in principle, with the freedom and flexibility to work outside traditional boundaries by using different approaches to curriculum, admissions, timetabling, recruitment, staffing and governance. Key observations from the July 2007 PricewaterhouseCoopers Academies Evaluation 4th Annual Report (p. 70) note the degree of leadership autonomy which is being utilised to the benefit of the rate of progress across a wide range of Academy activities making the Academy a more attractive place to both learn and to work. These include:

- Increasing the number of teaching hours by extending the school day;
- Teachers' pay and conditions adjusted to accommodate the longer school day;
- Evidence of a more flexible use of support staff to strengthen learning teams;
- Significant changes in curriculum options and pathways to provide more flexible options for students across the range of abilities;
- Some Academies now creating as their own admissions authorities and selecting up to 10 per cent of students according to their specialism;
- Principals working in partnership with their Sponsors to access resources which they report would not have been previously available.

The report generally concludes that, in this respect, independence appears to have given Principals far greater confidence and autonomy to explore new avenues of funding and also new partnerships within the wider community.

With the weight of Sponsors often comes a model of business autonomy, often linked to an increase in entrepreneurship on the part of Academy leaders, which those Principals interviewed report they have been empowered to emulate in their running of their Academy:

> *'The expectation is that we are a success and my Sponsor has always made it clear that, as Chief Executive, I need to deliver these targets. He asks how I am going to deliver them and then gives me the pragmatic support whether it be linked to the finances of the school, the structure, the staffing ... whatever. This extends to the confidence that if I need to get rid of somebody that I should just deal with it because we can't afford to ride out mistakes or weaknesses. The children get only one chance and they can't suffer because someone is not up to the job. I would never have had this autonomy as a head before and it is quite liberating when you are actually allowed to make it happen. The rest of the staff also appreciate it because they want to be aligned with success and professionalism.'*
> (Respondent 2)

To some this may seem a rather ruthless mode of operation at face value, however the respondents all articulated the time it took them to make the adjustment to the level of autonomy they have with their post as Academy Principals compared with their previous roles as headteachers. For some it was easier than others but as one said:

> *'I've developed skills that didn't exist in me before and I now have the confidence to make the decisions from the position of autonomy I have in this job but I was very cautious at first and, although that's not always a bad thing, I think it showed my lack of confidence in my actions. Staff could see that and so I've got over that and now make the hard decisions but we move on quickly from it and have had some very positive outcomes, particularly with changing the way we run things like performance management and target setting. I'm accountable and so is*

everyone else and they see the transparency in the system and why we've done it and how we've improved as a result in a short time.'
(Principal 10)

'Ratcheting up standards in absolutely everything we do comes in a way from the fact that I can't lose sight of us as a limited company and the responsibilities I have to the Trustees of this Academy as a result. It means that you are constantly under pressure to do things bigger, better and faster and the outcomes have to be clearly measurable. But that does make every sense when you think about it because this is tax payers money and they deserve to get good value for it. I am accountable to the public purse but I am able to deliver these results in whatever way I see fit without half of the red tape that colleagues in other schools have to put up with. The thing is they generally don't challenge it because it is nice and secure and what has always happened and what they know. For me, I need the freedom to do it differently and my way with a team who are on board and not afraid to look outside the box. That is a major attraction for me of running an Academy.'
(Respondent 3)

The ability of and requirement for Academy Principals to be able to articulate what needs to be done to move the school forward to a progressively stronger position in the community through communication, co-operation and demonstrating successful outcomes not only in examination results but behavioural and attitudinal characteristics of the learners is a substantial challenge. Two of the respondents expressed their frustration at not being able to make the necessary step changes in their previous posts due to Local Authority bureaucracy and indeed slowness of response on the part of their governing bodies. As one said:

'What I really needed to do was a re-branding exercise so that the school would be seen differently by the local community and we could recruit. Here at the Academy I have had the freedom to do this, not only superficially but in terms of the way the day is structured, the courses we offer and the whole way we package things. It's very corporate and I still like to oversee that side of things so that there is a very consistent brand to the way we do things both inside and outside. I'd had the ideas in my head for some time and being able to officially have freedom to control things meant that everything moved quickly and is done in a very distinctive way which the staff and students certainly relate to and which the locals even talk about when I'm out and about at the end of the day on the gate or

visiting other schools. Bearing in mind we were a failing school it's not rocket science how being allowed to do the job which I have been in this respect has given the school more than a face lift – the results and numbers wanting to come here speak for themselves.'
(Respondent 12)

The feeling from the respondents of an increase in status that a high level of leadership accountability brought with it in their role is an interesting point to explore:

'In a way I think such level of autonomy as a Principal brings with it a degree of arrogance or perhaps permission to be a little bit arrogant. Not in a negative way but in a 'I can get this done now and do it well for everyone to benefit from'. You do need to be able to stand up to people and be sure of what you are about and why you are doing things. People certainly listen to you when they know you are the head honcho and don't have to get permission or approval from someone else. It does open doors and make everything move faster and when you're under the pressure that we are as Academy heads to make huge improvements from a very low starting point we need that extra bit of licence that you get with this autonomy.'
(Respondent 8)

From the feedback of the respondents it can be argued that their personal experiences suggest that they appreciate the leadership autonomy which their position affords and that they ensure that they make very good use of it to both establish and then maintain the pace and direction of progress of their Academy, always mindful of the close public scrutiny which Academies at the time of writing continue to experience both locally and nationally.

4.7   Key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies

With the focus and drive for constant and rapid improvement it is important to establish those factors which the respondents articulated as being inhibitors and accelerators to the successful outcomes of Academies. It is worth noting that during the process of transformation some

initial inhibitors become accelerators whilst conversely some of the accelerators in the early stages of the Academy's life become inhibitors and that this may happen at different stages and in different degrees depending on a plethora of factors for individual Academies in their journey from transformation to sustainability. Additionally it could be argued that the inhibitors or accelerators can work in partnership in that an accelerator may accelerate further a factor which is a latent inhibitor, thus slowing the process of movement towards successful outcomes. Similarly, some inhibitors can gain such momentum that they become positive accelerators for the good of the Academy. In each case there is the possibility of creating sub-groups of those aspects deemed to be external or internal inhibitors or accelerators but this is a fine delineation which, for the purposes of the discussion here, creates unnecessary levels of complication and would reduce the clarity of the discussion.

In outline, the key inhibitors and accelerators as identified through the interviews are listed in Table 4.7 and discussed in greater detail afterwards with the key aspects denoted in **bold** as the discussion progresses:

Inhibitors to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies	Accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies
Media	Media
Community	Community
Building	Building
Staff	Staff
Unions	Sponsor
Politics	Principal
Legacy of predecessor school	Starting afresh
Urban myth	Autonomy
Bureaucracy	Independent status
	Funding and Financial mechanisms

Table 4.7 : Key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies

There has been much mention by the respondents of the role both local and national **media** have had to play, particularly the press, in presenting negative interpretations of factors such as examination result for an Academy placing them without any analysis to show raw data figures for results alongside other schools without similar challenges. The creation of the post of Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Schools and Learners) in the DCFS held by Lord Adonis has helped to provide a national voice for all Academies with articulate, well reasoned and high level analysis which, coupled with the five year longitudinal commissioning by the then DfES (now DCSF) of the study into Academies by PricewaterhouseCoopers, has significantly reduced the amount of negative press and media coverage on Academies. Their trend towards

oversubscription now indicates parental confidence and the move for both selective and also fee-paying independent schools to become Academies is further weakening the original arguments of the media. This, coupled with the Conservative Party's backing of the Academies Programme, has shifted the focus and spotlight from individual Academy leaders to the programme nationally, thereby accelerating the demand for Academy places in some areas and maintaining a steady state demand in the rest.

Throughout the interviews the respondents cited the importance of the **community** and their desire to address the social injustice, which they felt had been the lot of the community for so long left unaddressed, in their initial decision to lead an Academy and then to involve and empower the wider community which the Academy catchment served. Community perceptions have been articulated in this chapter as both being something which Principals had to struggle against to win the confidence of and reduce suspicion. However conversely in some areas where the community fought a battle to get an Academy the support Principals have received has been very strong and the move to remove the VAT rule preventing full use of facilities after school hours has been warmly welcomed by Principals and has started to draw in yet wider community usage to positive effect. As one Principal commented:

> *'I feel as though we have mobilised a whole section of the community who were stuck indoor with the satellite TV before. There's just so much for them to do here from parenting classes, sports clubs, learning English and other languages and even cookery classes. It was a long time in coming but now we hand out as many application forms for student admissions to these people as we do membership of the fitness club here and our first choice applications for September have almost doubled. They all bring their friends to use the facilities and their friends want their children to go to school with each other so there are strong bonds too.'*
> (Respondent 10)

Much has been said by the respondents about the impact of the **building and learning environment** as contributory factors to the success or progress and also attitude and aspirations of the learners as a result. In those Academies who worked from temporary or existing sub-standard buildings during the building or the new school facilities this was the single most cited factor in putting the rate of progress and success at risk. The pressures of working in confined spaces, often with little play area and off-site sports facilities, tested Principals fully:

> *'We were in these portacabins and only half of the science lessons for example could be done in labs so the rest were just theory in classrooms. Our kids don't learn well like that. They are very kinaesthetic learners and then, having been stuck in portacabins for the morning we had to get them off to the sports field we were hiring with no proper changing rooms or showers. You can imagine what teaching them was like after that. I really don't think we could have sustained it beyond the two years before we move into this building. I can actually see just how much the students appreciate what they have now and I hope they don't forget it too quickly.'*
> (Respondent 1)

Others remained in the predecessor school buildings where no funds would be spent as they decayed further around them as they watched the new buildings go up on what were often their playing fields:

> *'We had to keep the faith and keep showing the staff and children that across the field was where we'd be in a year's time. Of course they had lost most of their outdoor play areas and there was the whole business of managing a massive construction site with teenagers who would love any chance to get on a bulldozer so we had to work hard to stop them getting distracted and the noise was a battle to teach against some days. The result is fantastic though and taking the children around on the first official day they started their mouths were just open with amazement as we went from the Theatre to the Drama Studio to the Sports Hall and into the D & T rooms. It was very emotional to see children speechless and they certainly deserve to get this after what they had before. They also really respect the building and look after it.'*
> (Respondent 6)

One of the contributing aspects to the success of an Academy raised by the respondents is that of getting the right **staff** and the right staffing structure. The process, however, of staffing an Academy has been talked of by those interviewed as often a battle, particularly in those schools where staff from the predecessor school are heavily unionised and the process of Transfer Under Protection of Employment (TUPE) is in place as part of the recruitment of staff to the new Academy. This in itself can be viewed as a key inhibitor because of the negative feelings which it generated in some schools in the early stages and the way it spread through the local teacher associations to reinforce any negative feelings towards Academies. The role of the professional associations and **unions** in the process of Academies opening cannot be underestimated. In some areas union action and misinformation to members has slowed the process of Academies opening and increased community pressure not to establish them. Those staff appointed to brand new schools with no predecessor school were able to avoid the TUPE process and also the feelings which can build up in staffrooms. As one Principal recalls:

> *'I had to work in a hut across the field while the head of the predecessor school continued to run the place. I was given half a day to meet and address all the staff before the recruitment and TUPE process started. It was horrendous. It was like being a social leper apart from the fact that it was me who was going to be running the Academy so it was in their interest to listen to what I wanted to do and see if they wanted to be a part of the new vision.'*
> (Respondent 12)

Staff can make or break the success and direction of a school. They can both inhibit progress and innovation but can also accelerate it and energise the process beyond anything previously experienced and become part of the momentum of success. Each respondent had something to tell of their experiences with staffing and all stressed the importance of getting the culture and

ethos right with the staff right the start in order to be able to transform the outcomes for the students.

Local **politics** arguably more so than national politics can inhibit the success of an Academy according to the experiences of the respondents. To some degree this is tied in with the reputation or **legacy of the predecessor school** and the views of the local community and Local Authority on its failure and reasons for it wherein there is a feeling that it can never be redeemed. Taken on its own the type of experience which one Principal had is common to many of those interviewed in the study:

> *'It became clear very early on that it was the internal issues of the Local Authority and individuals jostling for power and a voice – just to have their voice heard but not actually contributing anything either way to the process – that slowed everything down. Thankfully someone from the DfES was able to cut through it all and get it down to a reasoned set of supporting comments and objections but this went on for several months and then there was a change of political leadership after a local election so we were all thrown back into the great debate once again. In the end I don't know who gained from the political jostling but it certainly wasn't the children who were set back a year in being at the Academy as a result.'*
> (Respondent 11)

> *'The local councillors did make noises about wanting it [the school] to be better, to improve but it was clear that they thought it never could be if an Academy was built – they said it was the same children, same families – there was no sense that this community could actually be moved out from where they were at. There was no real belief or passion to help them. There was also no real representation of that community at the meeting so they didn't have a voice.'*
> (Respondent 10)

Coupled with the impact of the media and local politics is what can best be termed the **urban myth** of Academies, indeed arguably perpetuated or generated by the press and embellished by local politics. The unions were quick to capitalise on some aspects of the myth that

Academies are some educational monster whereby, for the sum of £2 million, a sponsor who knows noting about education would get total control of the curriculum and all matters relating to the running of the Academy (James Shaw, BBC Radio 4, PM Programme, 30.11.06). In no case of those respondents interviewed was this felt to be true. In fact it was fiercely contested by all Principals in the study who made it clear that they are tasked to run the Academy, its curriculum and structures and all appointments below that of Vice Principal. For many of the Academies their Sponsor did not even sit on the Board of Governors and a couple had moved on to other things and their role was deemed as founder and nothing further. Payment of staff in Academies was in line with or indeed slightly more than that in the maintained sector to reflect the structures, length of working day and responsibilities and all advised their staff to be members of unions and recognised the role of unions and professional associations. The inhibiting effect of such untruths for these early Academies had, in some instances, impact upon teacher recruitment. However once insiders reported the reality, colleagues from other schools were keen to explore the opportunities of taking posts in an Academy. As one Principal recalled:

> *'Last year was unprecedented. I only lost three teaching staff who all moved on to promoted positions having been here for three years since we opened and there were no fewer than fourteen applications for the posts from staff from local schools. I did shortlist and interview about six of those but I have to say they weren't up to the job. It's interesting but the other schools think they are so much better than us but I can tell you now that the staff I have working here are streets ahead in what they're doing for our kids than the people I interviewed from the local schools.'*
> (Respondent 3)

In the initial stages of the Academy Programme much of what was created was groundbreaking but also untested and the first time things had been done. Four of those

Principals interviewed talked of the levels of **bureaucracy** that made moving the process on slow and were inhibitors to keeping the pace moving forward after such a very public launch of the programme by the Prime Minister. The Academies Division at the then DfES was only just being established and everyone was working out the ways to operate in this new arena. One respondent recalled how:

> *'The various sections of the DfES did not seem to talk to each other and so I had to keep repeating myself when I needed anything done or advice before we could proceed with things. It wasted such a lot of time and then different departments wanted things done in one way only to have to redo it all in another way for another department. At least all that is smoothed out now but it did mean that time on things like curriculum design was being eroded by the bureaucracy in the initial setting up.'*
> (Principal 1)

One key player in the process of accelerating each Academy is the **Sponsor**. All respondents talked very positively indeed about what their Sponsor brought initially to the Academy by providing the backing for it and really putting their weight behind making it happen once the process had started. The business-like way of working, the determination to achieve success in all aspects of the organisation and a refusal to tolerate mediocrity are all mentioned by the Principals interviewed. Similarly, the **Principals** were all appointed by, amongst other on the panel, the Sponsor. It is the leadership of the Academy by the Principal which is established from the very start of each new Academy as the sole driver of the success model and the vision to be delivered. In most instances respondents reported how they were appointed as Principal and in post working alone to establish the foundations of success before any Vice Principals or other staff were appointed. Getting the appointment of the right Principal from the start is a critical job for the panel and the Sponsor but where this has succeeded, so has the success of the Academy accelerated under that Principal's leadership. With it brings the

expertise and foresight of that Principal to appoint and retain excellent staff, the determination to make the Academy a place of success and aspiration, to win the confidence of the community and parents and sustain the enthusiasm of the students. It is this drive and altruism which is arguably the single most powerful and long-term accelerator to successful outcomes of an Academy.

The opportunity not to simply fresh-start but to actually **start afresh** with **independent status** and **autonomy** in a new or substantially refurbished and re-modelled building has been shown in this chapter to positively keep the pace of transformation moving in the right direction. It is not so much a re-branding, it is a complete rebirth or new birth for a community of a provision which is totally unrecognisable from the previous unsuccessful one. With the freedom to design curriculum appropriate to the students, to state the non-negotiables of students, staff and parents from the start so that there is total clarity of culture and ethos and to have the freedom to work across a national network of Academies and their support functions if so desired rather than a local and parochial one has been deemed liberating by the respondents. With this comes the benefits of direct **funding and financial mechanisms** from the DCSF with fully devolved budgets which do not have to be returned if unspent but can be rolled over up to five per cent of the General Annual Grant each year for future projects which the Academy wants to embark upon. When weighed against the inhibitors which themselves often and somewhat ironically become aids to progress, these key accelerators are central to the successful outcomes for those leading Academies.

This research, its analysis and findings has highlighted key leadership issues for the successful development of Academy leadership with the model providing a valuable conceptual framework for leadership development in Academies in the future. The ability to use the experience of current Academy Principals has also helped to reframe practice and develop future leaders of schools operating in such challenging and complex contexts. It is from this point that an evaluation with recommendations and conclusions can be proposed.

CHAPTER 5   Evaluation, Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Evaluation and Impact

The starting point for this research and the resultant thesis was that of an investigation into the nature and dimensions for successful leadership of Academies with specific focus on six elements, they being

- the general, emerging prerequisites for leading a successful Academy;

- the leadership characteristics of existing effective Academy Principals;

- the strategic dimensions pertaining to leading an Academy to successful outcomes;

- the technical and operational dimensions specific to the leadership of Academies;

- the degree to which leadership autonomy contributes to pace and direction of progress;

- the key inhibitors and accelerators to successful outcomes of leadership of Academies.

Furthermore, the key premise for the research lay in the well-known and empirically validated fact that the quality of a school's leadership plays an unprecedented role in determining a school's success. In identifying and drawing upon what have been termed in this study the Dynamic Leadership Dimensions (i.e. transformational, sustainable, distributed, political, entrepreneurial and strategic leadership) through the process of analysis and consideration of the review of literature, the conceptual framework model evolved. Taking a set of what could arguably be deemed semi-hypothetical questions and testing them was indeed a challenge in itself in this study. Only as the six dynamic leadership dimensions became clearly applicable and directly relevant to the six elements borne from the review of literature did a coherent

structure for progressing the analysis of the research and refining the questions for the respondents become clear.

The initial review of literature provided an extensive array of material on the subject of leadership *per se* and much of that directly related to leadership of schools and in educational contexts, however none could be sourced relating specifically to the leadership of Academies. The original interview questions were derived directly from the first stages of the review of literature by way of validatory interviews and subsequent, ongoing review of the literature helped to provide the revised questions and also to refine the focus of the research.

Faced with such a wealth of literature on the subject of leadership and indeed school leadership, the initial interviews played an essential part in ensuring that the criteria regarding what to accept and pursue and what to reject from the literature be decided. The ongoing review of literature enabled the focus to be honed in on the key aspect of transformational and sustainable leadership and a clear link made with the results of the stage 2 interviews. In undertaking the coding and analysis of the transcripts from the first five interviews the elements of political, entrepreneurial and distributed leadership all came to the fore so that the ongoing review of literature could be more finely tuned to explore the role and impact these aspects had in other context and then an assessment made as to how important they were in the Academy leadership model. It was at this stage that the conceptual framework model was born, firstly as a flow chart thus:
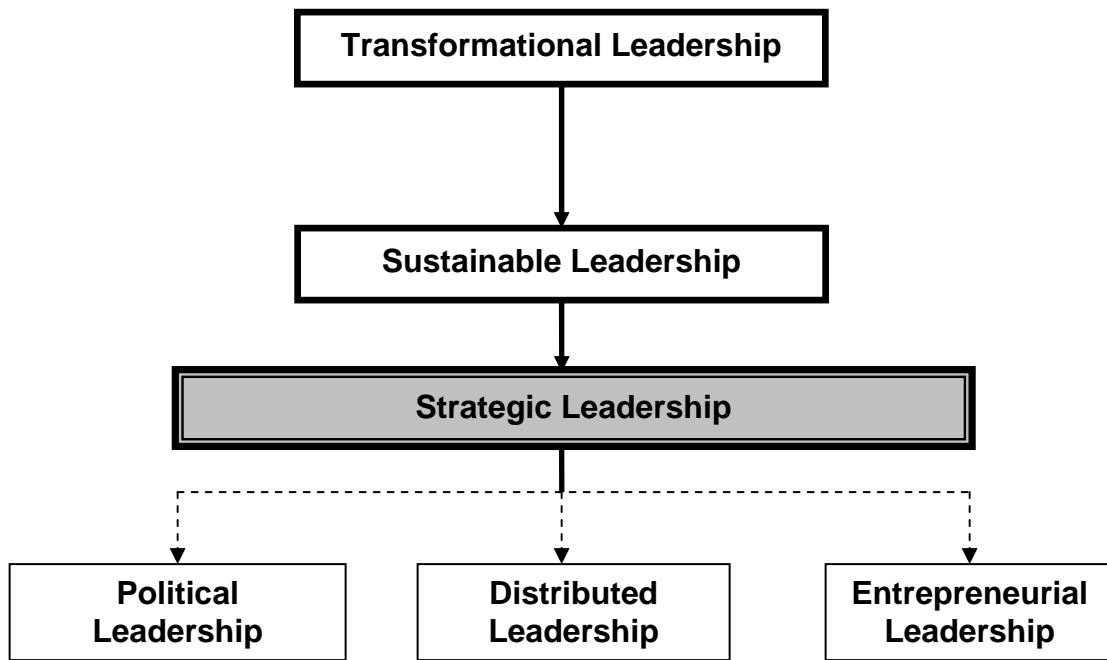
Figure 5.1 Initial flow chart of elements of leadership of Academies

Then, following the refinement of the interview questions and the results of the analysis of the first five interviews with respondents, into the more dynamic model (Figure 2.11) which has formed the discussion throughout this thesis whereby the complex interrelationships of the different leadership dimensions come into play in varying degrees and at various times throughout the process from transformation to sustainability. Using each of the elements from the model which finally came about, the distinct visualisation in itself was an aid in helping to work through the analysis of the interrelationships which the respondents spoke of in their interviews. In doing so it served as a reference tool and a reminder of the original source of the concept from the review of literature and the subsequent actualisation of the theory into a practical domain for those leaders.
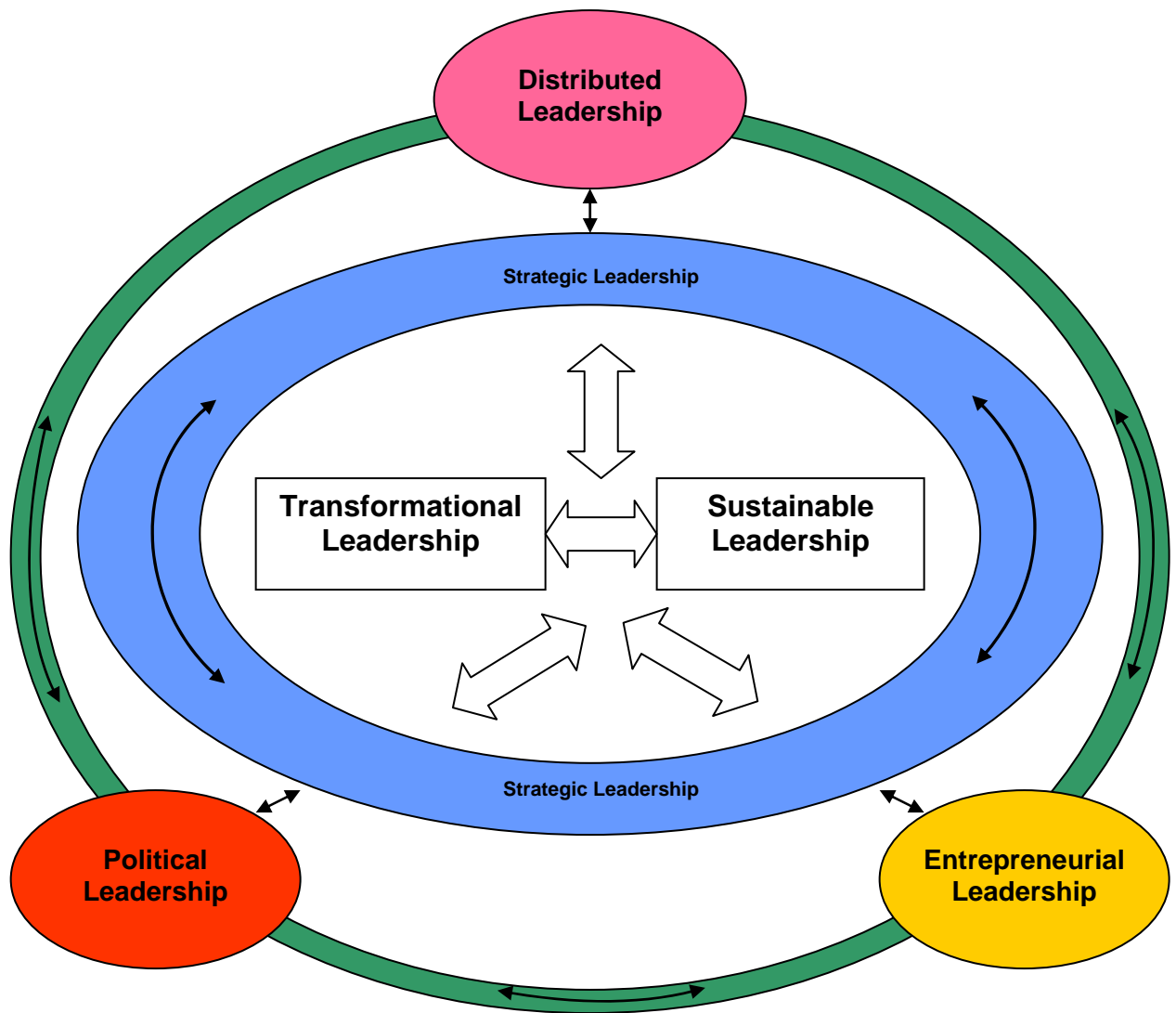
Figure 2.11 Dynamic elements contributing to dimensions for successful leadership of Academies

The repeated mention of the need to address the social injustice previously experienced by the communities the Academies served was one aspect which had not arisen in a specific form at any stage during the review of literature. However, the characteristic or tendency of leaders to demonstrate altruism and passion had and this aspect has been further explored during the

course of this thesis as a major contributing motivator for those leading the twelve Academies sampled.

With no published or evident research being conducted into the leadership of Academies at the time of writing, this work serves to impact upon the field in several significant ways. As the first substantial piece of research in what is a new national educational programme it provides a gateway to further research and raises awareness of several key issues to be addressed at national level as outlined throughout the thesis. It also raises awareness of the activities in the arena of transformational and sustainable school leadership at an academic and theoretical level whilst providing practical suggestions and considerations and making the findings explicit. Through the introduction of a new model, subsequent leadership structures both in schools and beyond can be tested and evaluated.

This work dispels many of the myths perpetuated by the media, including the much published claim that the sponsor runs the school in exchange for £2 million, through first hand accounts from the 12 Academy Principal respondents in this study who do the job day after day. The focus on the need for leadership development programmes to address the challenges specific to Academies and to prepare future leaders for the role together with an awareness of the skills, characteristics and experience that successful Academy leaders have been shown to possess is crucial in the recruitment and indeed retention of leaders to Academies. Having identified the importance of achieving sustainability after the process of transformation the need for succession planning to be an explicit task in the cycle of Academy development needs to be considered by the DCSF. The means by which it can be achieved is inextricably

linked with the process of identifying the key characteristics and attributes of effective Academy Principals as explored in this thesis and will arguably be one of the central drivers in ensuring the success of the Academies programme long into the future.

This research and findings will be of interest to several audiences. The DCSF, keen to ensure the continued success of the Academies programme, should consider the recommendations of this chapter and in doing so work with the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to develop a programme specific to the future leaders of Academies and those existing school leaders who want to move from the maintained school sector into that of leading an Academy. Already there is an increase in the level of interest from school leaders and other educationalists from further afield with countries including Iceland, as recounted by one respondent, looking at the possibility of establishing an Academy model of education, particularly the all-through school structure. With, as has been stated, little if any qualitative or quantitative work currently undertaken specifically on leadership of Academies, this work will be of interest to those working in the field of academia and, as sub-section 5.4 which follows proposes, the opportunities to develop the work further. Similarly, with arguably the only source of information on Academies and the programme available through the media, this study will be of interest to the teaching community, both to those currently employed in Academies and other schools and also those following the development of the Academies' programme as it expands at a pace, not least those already in senior leadership positions in schools and Academies. With the shift in opportunities for sponsors of Academies to include both Local Authorities and universities, this work provides the opportunity to consider and assess the types of leader required and raises an awareness of the challenges which may be

faced by them to ensure success of an Academy which new or potential sponsors may find helpful.

This research and analysis has also contributed to a briefing paper (Davies and Macaulay, forthcoming, Spring 2008) commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) in which the key elements of the final model are discussed. Furthermore a separately authored publication entitled *Under the Microscope: Leading in a climate of close public scrutiny* (Macaulay, Spring 2008) derived from this research and thesis has been published by the National College for School Leadership.

5.2 Lessons Learnt

The initial stages of the interview process, whereby the first set of questions which arose from the early stages of the review of literature, yielded several issues which needed to be addressed in the second iteration of the interview questions. Firstly, the transcriptions of the first two Phase 1 interviews showed a lack of structure so analysis and coding was extremely time consuming and lacked the focus which had been hoped. Further review of literature yielded additional issues to be addressed through the second iteration of interviews and the questions were more tightly focused on the leadership skills and capacities which were being investigated. The third iteration of the interview questions (see Appendix B) explicitly looked at those leadership elements which had evolved from the review of literature and had formed in the conceptual model whereby aspects of transformational, sustainable, entrepreneurial, political and distributed leadership were grouped in the way in which the questions were arranged. This allowed for a much more logical analysis from the transcriptions whilst also

preventing any leading questions from being asked. This was a time consuming exercise and one which, if the research were to be repeated the mistakes have been learnt. Nevertheless, the process itself brought the researcher closer to the material and forced a refocusing on both the nature of structure and order of interview questions and also their association with the literature review which in turn greatly assisted with the close level of analysis and engagement with the findings from the interviews.

Having identified the six key leadership dimensions of transformational, sustainable, entrepreneurial, political, distributed and strategic leadership from the extensive literature review, the challenge of combining them with the initial six questions of the thesis was a major task. This was not least because of the complexities of trying to express a one dimensional model in a dynamic and three dimensional leadership system such as that of leading an Academy or any large organisation. By trying to describe the model almost as if in orbit with its own atmosphere helped to lift it off the page and the reference to the strategic ribbon as a form of magnetic field around which the elements of entrepreneurial, political and distributed leadership orbit yet are 'virtually' attached and come into play in varying amounts and at different stages helped to make the model more tangible. Making some form of three dimensional model and animated DVD or using a software package whereby the elements can be animated is perhaps a possibility if a presentation on the model were to be explained outside of the confines of a printed thesis.

Due to the nature of the research capturing twelve Academies in their first three years of operation and at a time when the Academies programme was very new the opportunity and

scope to sample Academies that met this criteria was extremely limited. Most were located in and around London and most run by men. Although supposition only, it would be very interesting to see whether, with a greater number of Academes now open across England, there was any variation in the responses with the second wave of the programme from the new Principals and whether there were any difference in responses linked to gender of respondent. In this sample the number of respondents was too low to be able to determine any discernable differences in motivations, skills set or leadership dimensions between the gender of respondents. It is an aspect, however, that is worthy of consideration in future research.

Similarly, as well as geographical restrictions, the limitation of time in order to capture twelve Academies in a one year operational window meant that the opportunity to interview the sponsors and also the Vice Principals of the Academies to assess the extent to which there were similarities, patterns, difference or anomalies in what was expressed by the Principals and those who were most closely associated with their Academies would have been interesting. However whether broadening the scope of the research in this way would have actually contributed anything further to the focus of this particular study is debateable.

As with much research, having the opportunity to conduct it over an extended period of time would have been very interesting but not at all realistic in terms of this very focussed thesis which required a snapshot of a particular moment in time of a new programme. In some respects this is a strength rather than a weakness since, as is discussed in 5.4, significant opportunities could be explored for further research using this study as the foundations and as a comparator in the future.

5.3 Recommendations

This research has significant implications for policy at national level at the DCSF. The recruitment and training of Academy Principals is crucial to the effectiveness of the programme in the years to come. Taking the experiences of those Principals in Academies who have dealt with the initial issues as first phase Academy leaders and ensuring that the mistakes made, obstacles encountered and teething problems experienced whilst setting up without any template has to be the principle consideration. Now that there exists a critical mass of effective Academy Principals and indeed a set of Vice Principals who are effectively learning the skills of leadership whilst serving alongside their leaders, the development opportunities for the next wave of Academy leaders need to be expanded upon, refined and invested in. The argument that outstanding leaders are born and not made may have some truth but for there to be leaders of up to 400 Academies in the next five years there needs to be a very clear and systematic system for training, supporting their development and then recruiting them to the posts of Principal.

The roles of the Principal and Sponsor and their relationship to one another and that of governance has come in for much media scrutiny in the initial phase of Academies, often with much misinterpretation of the actual operation of the sponsor and governing body and causing a perpetuation and degree of damage to the programme in the process. Finding the right Principals to work with the sponsor and the process by which this is done is something that needs to be examined more carefully. In the case of the original 12 Academies opening in 2002 and 2003 only two of the original Principals remain of which four comprised the respondent sample of twelve for this study. The ten who have left have done so for varying

reasons and under differing circumstances but all were unable to deliver the challenges of the Academies they were appointed to lead. The new Principals, however, appointed to replace them have been able to fulfil the requirement, meet the challenges and look to remain in post for the foreseeable future. The insecurity of the first phase of Principals departing from their posts in what was an already very high profile public appointment and arguably contentious programme for some has left a feeling of insecurity for some prospective Academy Principals. The reality is that the necessarily high level of accountability has resulted in, just as in the commercial and business sector, the need to move leaders on who fail to achieve the necessary results. The timescale for doing so is no more reasonable yet it is still those school leaders who are in the latter stages of their careers and who are predominantly men who are prepared to take what is seen by many as a high risk job. If the figures for 400 Academies are to be met, and without a large number of existing Academy Principals taking on the role of Executive Principal of several Academies, the DCSF needs to recognise that traditional routes for appointing excellent leaders have to change. In reality the majority of Academy Principals are still appointed through the more commercial process of headhunting although the posts do go to national advertisement. The original process of appointing Principals through application and interview as is the manner in Local Authority maintained schools has clearly not been successful with only 2 of the original remaining. What they were looking for were school headteachers rather than leaders with the entrepreneurial, political and strategic leadership qualities which this research has made clear are essential prerequisites for leading an Academy to successful outcomes. In that respect the model used in the business world from where the majority of sponsors still come seems to be more effective with little if any movement out of Principals between 2006 and 2008. The opportunity to spend time with Principals or Academy

Vice Principals in their own organisations and seeing them in action is a far more useful means of assessing whether they will be able to deliver in another context than through a process of application form filling and interview only.

This research has highlighted the leadership skills, requirements and personal characteristics and motivators for effective and successful Academy leadership. The challenge for policy makers and the practical demands if the programme is to grow at the rate the government have announced is to see how these aspects of leadership can be sustained and indeed developed. There is a certain degree of charisma in all those Academy Principals interviewed and a further challenge for the future is how to ensure the culture and ethos of the Academies which is borne largely out of personal leadership charisma can be embedded so that it remains and can also be replicated when a leader moves on. It is this sustainability and replication which has been an overriding focus and theme throughout this thesis and which those making the decisions and implementing the policy in the future need to place at the forefront of their decision making if the Academy programme is to continue to succeed with the challenging rate of growth with which it has been tasked.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

As is so often the case with engagement for an extended period of time and intensity such as a thesis provides, during the course of the research and writing several openings towards further research become clear. This is one of the frustrating aspects of a final thesis – the fact that there can realistically only be one thesis for the researcher to work on at a time but just at the point when it starts to become incredibly exciting and the work is framed and contextualised

the chapter for this research has to close. Opening the possibility of subsequent further research in the field the suggestions which now follow could contribute a significant amount for future researchers and impact in this area.

With the Academies programme expanding at a pace which could not have been predicted at the start of this research the opportunities and indeed need for further research from this point is extensive. At the start of this research 27 Academies had been open for two or three years. At the concluding point of this study 62 are open with a government commitment of 200 to be open by 2010 and a total of 400 operating only two to three years after that date as part of the acceleration of the programme. The need to assess the longer term impact of the Academies programme and the way its leadership may have developed and adapted to a bigger arena is an important stage in this line of research.

This study, by necessity limited to an examination of the senior leadership of Principals of 12 Academies, does not take into account the views of the Vice Principals nor the Sponsors of the Academies in the sample. These should be considered as key respondents in subsequent research where the process of moving from a transformational state to that of sustainability can be assessed and the impact measured. Similarly, the students, their parents and the local community themselves are the subject of the respondents in this research and they too could provide insight into the processes and factors which led to their Academy becoming a success in comparison with their knowledge and experience of the predecessor school.

The methodology of individual interviews and case studies as used here could certainly be used if the sample were to continue to be small scale such as the 12 Academies in this study with only one or two respondents per school. However, a reappraisal of the methodology need to be considered for a larger scale student or staff sample even if the original 12 Academies as chosen for this research were to be pursued. The goal posts are changing with the removal of the requirement of a £2 million sponsor contribution and, as a result, the active interest of Local Authorities and higher education to sponsor new Academies brings with it a different dimension for the Academies programme with social and intellectual investment. An examination of the role and representation of Academies by the media would serve as a very interesting research study, looking at the original 27 Academies and tracing the media coverage over a three to five year period and beyond as the number of Academies grows at a very rapid pace. Furthermore the impact of the media on Academy Principals of the first Academies and the extent to which they are directly affected as the number of open Academies moves towards 100 by September 2009 could be assessed in relation to the notion of leading under the spotlight in a climate of close public scrutiny with lessons learnt and strategies developed to address such attention.

The model in this study started with the notion that an Academy had to be quite radically transformed from anything that may have existed from a predecessor school or expectation in the community by its leadership to then move towards a position of sustainability. At the time of this research most of the respondents were either in the transformational stage of leadership or the early period of ensuring sustainability. Further research into the ways in which sustainability can be maintained and the degree to which elements in the original model

proposed here of political leadership, entrepreneurial leadership and distributed leadership have a role to play or whether additional, different or even new leadership aspects are required to move the Academy to the next stage to avoid complacency could be considered. A weighing up of the balance of the original leadership elements as proposed and assessed here in Chapter 4 and their role and impact once an Academy is stable is important if successful leadership of this type of school is to be replicated.

Like the City Technology Colleges (CTCs) from which the Academies model has come, further research into the leadership of some of the new Academies which may have been Vice Principals in the early Academies is worthy of attention. An examination of the extent to which the leadership skills and attributes have been carried from one Academy to another by the next generation of Academy Principals would serve as a very important and useful piece of research. To examine how replication can secure success and the degree to which the same or modified aspects of leadership from their original Academy where they were Vice Principals can be transferred would be useful for future Principals' training programmes. Furthermore, there may be scope to track some of the original Academy Principals and Vice Principals and see whether they stay within the Academies system and replicate or develop the work undertaken there in school improvement or whether some have moved from leading Academies and taken it into Trust Schools or other Local Authority maintained schools to see if the same features of the Academy can be or have been replicable in other contexts.

An assessment into the key motivators of school leaders to take on the role of Academy Principal matched to those leaders of other types of schools could bring to the fore some

interesting research into key characteristics of each and, over an extended period, an analysis as to whether there is a shift in leadership prerequisites as the Academies programme gains in size and the opportunity to share with others both in and beyond the Academies programme is opened up. Furthermore, the opportunity to replicate the research and focus undertaken for this thesis in five or more years time to assess the extent to which the findings and conclusions are similar or wholly different and the mind and skill set of the Principals serving in the future in this sample of 12 Academies have altered would be worthy of examination.

From the respondents there has been an overwhelming expression of the social motivation for them in leading an Academy. Further research assessing the impact of Academies not only in terms of examination results but in respect to the effects upon the local community and aspects such as the destination of school leavers from the Academy would serve as a very useful qualitative and quantitative study judged against the key leadership characteristics and dimensions of the Principals both as identified in this research and also subsequent research.

Exploring whether the role of the sponsor has changed and their relationship to the Principals would provide an interesting line of investigation since the sponsor was central and so much a focus for the media attention in the initial Academies as examined in this study. Whether, with 400 Academies and possibly 350 or more sponsors their profile and role may change and how it does that is another suggestion for further large scale research stemming from the seeds sown in this study. Similarly further investigation into whether the key motivators of sponsors in fact match that of the Principals some years into the programme and the impact any commonality or differences have on the success of the Academy is worthy of examination.

5.5 Conclusions

This research and resultant thesis has used the 'leadership voices' of twelve Academy Principals to identify, explore and highlight key leadership dimensions for the successful development and future leadership of Academies. It is hoped that the dynamic leadership dimensions of the conceptual framework model coupled with the six elements originally derived from the early review of literature, refined and tested through the stages of interviews with respondents, has provided a framework which can be used as a starting point for further leadership development in Academies. The opportunity to use the experience of current Academy Principals from this research to reframe practice and develop future leaders as part of the national school leadership agenda paves the way for the future of leadership development of schools. The complexities and challenges facing the school leaders of the future have little reference points from the past. Academy leaders are serving as pathfinders in this arena ahead of their time to challenge and transform with an end goal to effect change. A clear and pragmatic check list for the immediate future for Principals as a practical tool for the desk and not the briefcase to secure successful leadership include:

➢ ensuring that the central focus of Academy leadership is to mobilise the school and community to transform it and, in doing so, promote rapid and sustainable improvement;

➢ making sure the 'why lead an Academy' is a passion and commitment for social justice and the chance to give disadvantaged youngsters a better deal that is shared unconditionally throughout the school;

➢ ensuring delivery of rapid short-term transformational improvement whilst at the same time creating sustainable strategic development;

- operating in an enhanced political climate which necessitates the need for Academy Principals to display high quality political skills and abilities at local, regional and national level in a climate of close public scrutiny;

- developing their entrepreneurial skills as leaders and managers in the education sector whilst at the same time working in partnership with their sponsors to further develop these skills to the benefit of their Academy and wider community it serves;

- refocusing governance and leadership roles to encompass the nature and dimensions of their Academy;

- reengineering the organisational culture and ethos and the physical surroundings to 'create a sense of place' where learning can flourish;

- maximising the potential of autonomy to enhance their ability to work in partnerships with external groups and develop their own decision-making skills;

- developing high level intra- and inter- personal skills as a vital factor in Academy leadership;

- developing mechanisms for distributing leadership both within and across the Academy and within the broad Academies programme as it expands to cross-fertilise ideas and best practice so that it can be taken to scale.

Education is so often the last bastion to change. The Academies programme is working to address the previously systemic underperformance of particularly challenging schools and this work and in particular the voices and experiences of those leading Academies is a powerful testament to the successful impact and outcomes it is experiencing even at this relatively early stage of the programme.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample letter to Academy Principals inviting them to participate in the research.

Date

Principal's Name
Academy Address

Dear **X**

Ref. **PhD research into Leadership of Academies**

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) has awarded me a Research Associateship for three years to work with Professor Brent Davies of the Business School at Hull University as part of my MPhil/PhD. In November I took over as Principal of West London Academy, a 3-19 provision in Ealing.

The specific focus of my research is to identify the particular challenges, complexities and skills set required by leaders of Academies and the extent to which this context of leadership is impacting on leaders to operate in a new or possibly different environment.

Part of my research involves interviewing 12 Academy Principals during the 2005-6 academic year, both from CTCs changing to Academies where there may be existing experience in working in a 'state funded independent school' context, and also Principals of Academies whose backgrounds are from the LA maintained sector and I have completed 6 of the interviews to date.

The interview will last <u>no longer than 45 minutes</u> and questions would be sent to you in advance. The interview or 'conversation' would be digitally recorded and all responses reviewed and transcribed by me and a full copy of the transcription sent to you for checking prior to me including it in any further qualitative research analysis. All responses will be analysed in such as way as to guarantee anonymity unless you would like your views to be specifically identified. NCSL Research Associates and University of Hull Research Students work to a strict published Code of Research Practice and the provisions in the Data Protection Act 1998 (and any subsequent acts) will be adhered to.

I fully appreciate the demands on your time but believe that, as Principal of **X Academy** you may have an interest in the focus and scope of this work and, through participating, on the contribution it will make to the development of leadership training and development to meet the needs of Academies and schools in operating in similarly challenging circumstances in England over the next three to five years.

I can be contacted on **(mobile no.)** or by e-mail as per my business card attached and was wondering whether an early appointment on **(suggest dates/times)** would be suitable.

I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Hilary Macaulay

Appendix B i: Phase 1 Interview questions for Academy Principals

1. Why did you apply for the post of Principal of this Academy? Why an Academy?

2. What leadership challenges (both internal and external) has this Academy presented you with?

3. How did you go about identifying, introducing and sustaining the culture and ethos of this Academy?

4. Do you feel there is a type of leader required for an Academy (i.e. are there key skills and competencies which are essential/beneficial/desirable?)

5. What is different about the things/challenges Principals of Academies are faced with compared with other schools (e.g. Maintained schools)?

6. What is the balance between your strategic/operational role?

7. What, from your experience and insight, do you see are the longer term leadership skills and requirements (3-5 years) for this Academy?

8. How will you go about developing and sustaining the direction and focus of your leadership over the next 3 -5 years?

9. What do the sponsors bring to the Academy (good and bad)?

10. What are the major differences between the way you operate with your sponsors/governors at this Academy compared with your previous experience of governance?

11. What aspects of your relationship to governors/sponsors have developed or emerged during your time as Principal at date?

Appendix B ii: Phase 2 Interview questions for Academy Principals

(Phase 2 Interviews for final 3 validating interviews)

1. Why did you apply for the post of Principal of this Academy? Why an Academy? (look for opportunities to do things differently, commitment to combating social inequality etc)

2. What **leadership challenges** (both internal and external) has this Academy presented you with?

3. What are the key aspects which you had to **transform** and how did you go about doing this?

4. How did you go about identifying, introducing and **sustaining** the culture, ethos and direction of this Academy?

5. To what extent were staff prepared to take a lead … and who did you introduce/develop this … and what have been the outcomes? (**distributed leadership**)

6. Do you feel there is a **type of leader** required for an Academy (i.e. are there key
7. **leadership styles**, skills and competencies which are essential/beneficial/desirable?)

8. What is different about the challenges Principals of Academies are faced with compared with other schools (e.g. Maintained schools)? (look for **political**, **entrepreneurial**…..)

9. What would you describe are the challenges for you in terms of your **strategic/operational/technical** role as Academy Principal?

10. To what extent do you feel you have leadership **autonomy** (and what effect does this have on the Academy and the way you lead)?

11. What, from your experience and insight, do you see are the longer term leadership skills and requirements (3-5 years) for this Academy? (**sustainability**)

12. How will you go about developing and **sustaining** the direction and focus of your leadership over the next 3 -5 years?

13. What do the sponsors bring to the Academy and what aspects of your relationship with governors/sponsors have developed or emerged during your time as Principal at date?

Appendix C

Sample of selected section of transcription of digitally recorded interview with Academy Principal.

HM: Why did you apply for the post of Principal of X Academy and also why an Academy?

MW: Well what happened was this that I was asked by the Project Management Group, CEA to become their Education Consultant and I got this phone call to say would I do this, so I said yes I would. So I wrote the sort of education brief

HM: As well as doing your job at...?

MW: Yeah I was a Head at the time and I did that and that meant working with um the Richard Rogers Partnership, the Architects of this place and through them I got to know X who's the sponsor. And I'd seen various presentations on what the school should look like and bla bla bla and one day I got a phone call from his PA or his office to say could I go to lunch with him. I half knew what it was going to be about and he said 'we'd like you to do the job' and I said, 'well I've been at my school for 18 years, it's very successful, I never thought I'd be moving on, I'll be 58 by the time I start, so you really want a younger person to do this'. So he said 'no, no, no', I'll tell you why because he wanted his vision to be realised you know.

HM: Yes.

MW: Put their ideas into practice, so after a lot of humming and ahhing I applied... I applied and got the job. Um and I then spent a year setting it all up. So that's how I did it. If I'd known the hassle involved...

HM: [*Laughs*]

MW: ...in getting this place up and running and dealing with all the issues, all the issues that academies throw up then I might have thought twice about it.

HM: Was the fact that it's an academy, did that itself have any appeal?

MW: Well I mean I'm the sort of person who always likes a bit of a challenge, no matter how old you are you think oh yeah I can do this, so that was one of the things. Secondly, you know there's that altruistic bit as well and you want to do good and it's happened that children had suffered over generations through poor schools etc, and this is on the site of a badly failing school so I thought well you know these kids could do with a good school. You don't get the chance often to start a new school from scratch and develop its ethos. So all those things really. Um but then you know I mean it was at the same time that the Academy Programme was being initiated so we were all thinking on our feet at the time and there were very few systems in operation, the personnel were constantly changing, all the sort of policies that we had to develop

as an academy were... Yeah this thing was interesting and I spent a year building, the place up and running.

HM: You hinted that had you known some of the things that you now do know, you know you might have, not necessarily have thought differently, but that leads me onto the next question regarding the leadership challenges, both sort of internal in terms of you running this academy but also the external challenges that you had in setting it up and looking at it now.

MW: Erm, well I think expectations were too high and I think they are much more realistic now.

HM: Whose expectations?

MW: I think you know the DfES' expectations were far too high and they sent... I think they sent out the wrong sort of messages to... to academies, which were they want immediate change and change... all school improvements are incremental. I think they've come to realise that now. Um I think also you know dealing with a sponsor was a new experience, a new setup, dealing with an LEA who, you know you have to sort of build up a relationship with, they've got to be sort of kept at a distance. So and huge expectations of... of parents as well...

HM: Yes.

MW: ...and the whole the community. And you know as well as I do that... that people are going to make the difference at the start...

HM: Absolutely.

MW: ...children are children and there is a certain amount of resistance to coming to an academy I think in those early days...

HM: The staff...

MW: Yeah.

HM: Because of politics?

MW: Yeah you'd put an advert in looking for some middle management and you know I didn't get many applications. One of the reasons I think was because we were new. The message had gone out and then you know to organisations that you're going to have to work harder for less money and your conditions of service won't be as good bla bla bla. So there was a certain amount of resistance from staff in Hackney certainly. The problem was elsewhere in London was well they didn't want to come in here so I had to network extensively, I'm sure you've had to do the same, to get good teachers.

HM: I suppose a lot of it rests on your own 'previous' and people knowing you.

MW: Yeah.

HM: Did you bring people with you?

MW: I did. I brought people with me and I phoned up people that I knew.

HM: So that's two years ago / three years ago. What about the challenges now?

MW: Um the challenges now are to maintain momentum; we're massively over subscribed and very popular. We've got good kids here, we've got the full range of ability, we've got good social links, we've got the middle classes as well as the kids in the local estate, I think we've got a good setup.

HM: Yes.

MW: We've got a good mixture of staff who've got the experience...

MW: We've got a high number of statemented pupils as well, we've got the highest in Hackney in fact.

HM: Really.

MW: Yeah, but we've got a good staff. Our problems are accommodating 1,000 people on a very tight site.

HM: Yes, especially with sixth form.

MW: So yeah, whether that's being able to develop systems, we're quite rigid here in the way we operate things. I wouldn't call it sergeant major-ish but it's got to be like that to make this building work.

HM: And the staff have adapted to that quite well?

MW: Yeah, yeah.

HM: Now you have had the pleasure, a privilege setting up an academy from scratch with all the raw materials and everything, but how did you go about identifying the culture and sustaining... introducing that culture and sustaining the culture and X Academy is the huge amount of excellent press you get, which must itself carry the momentum?

MW: Yeah um, I haven't changed my views because I've come here about how the school should be run. I'm been working in city schools all my teaching life, so I believe they should run in a particular way. So I haven't changed anything about how I ran my previous schools and I've transplanted it into a new building and um I hope it works. And occasionally we've had a few battles to fight you know over the usual sort of

uniform, the kids standing up and all that and all the rest of it, but at the same time I want the teaching, I want the new technology to be used, and all that sort of stuff, um so the quid pro quo for demanding things that maybe don't go down at all well with some of the parents here, you certainly think they can and retain them with their levels that their kids have achieved.

HM: So how do you make sure that the staff all do it?

MW: One you recruit the sort of person you think will fit into the ethos and b) you establish role models in the school that sort of culture so the senior staff communicate this is what we do here you know, this is the way it started.

HM: Yes, I suppose once it's embedded as well the children are the ones who actually keep it going because they have expectations of the school?

MW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HM: Yes, I mean have you rogue staff or anyone who you've found it hard to move on, that sort of thing?

MW: No, no, well that was because they knew, I've not encountered it with anyone. We've had people who haven't come up to scratch and left and ones who felt it wasn't for them but um other than that we've got nearly 40 staff here, so they've all been pretty good.

HM: Do you feel that there is a type of leader required for an academy? There are only 27 academies open at the moment. Are there certain prerequisite skills or anything that a leader...?

MW: Well these places are all in tough urban areas, not all of them are now but they are in difficult areas and you need people who are resilient, who are also tough to face the pressures of turning places around and turning around people too and you need people who um are able to be flexible and adaptable and to move with the constantly changing demands. They need to be resourceful and can look at the problem and look at various ways of tackling that problem and thinking outside the box. You need certain people who understand how urban schools operate and who are a bit streetwise themselves.

HM: It's interesting you say a lot of those things because if you look at the recruitment of Academy Principals to post, there's no particular format for the way that they're recruited...

MW: No... is' all very responsive and that's very dangerous because you could get a person who's maybe very good in Shropshire or Norfolk but maybe absolutely hopeless in London. And that's a great danger, so I think the DfES need to think clearly about appointments for these people and I think you know you need to appoint people who have experienced headship already.

HM: That's interesting...

MW: But why... why move to an academy if you're already a successful head teacher so people need to think about that. Because... because the challenges are that much greater, the pressures are that much greater and dealing with an unknown entity i.e. a sponsor is also a hugely challenging issue.

HM: You mentioned the fact that you're mentoring the new head of X Academy. What happens if one discovers that halfway through, actually that person perhaps is not going to cut the mustard?

MW: I think you've got to start alerting people to that um and try and er, the first thing you try and do of course is try and improve the situation and communicate to that principal that things aren't going as well as they possibly should be and these are the strategies you should be using, but at the end of the day you know it's the wrong person, the wrong job and DfES need to know that, the sponsor needs to know as well at the earliest stage possible.

HM: Yes I mean the sponsor obviously does throw a lot of themselves behind the appointment of that person so detaching themselves, if there is an issue, from the person that they very publicly backed who is perhaps not doing what they were put in place to do is a hard things for a sponsor to accept or recognise but they need to remove them.

MW: Yeah I think a lot of these sponsors are used to that...

HM: Used to it because of their job, their own experience?

MW: Because of their job, they're used to hiring and firing, I don't think it matters too much to them you know.

HM: Yes, yes.

MW: But I would say that a lot of these people who come in to these sponsors have a very limited experience of how schools should operate and therefore need a great deal of guidance.

HM: Yes.

MW: In terms of our own sponsor, much as I love him I have had a few battles with him about how things should be done here.

HM: Erm hum, because he's got a set of ideas...?

MW: Yeah which I knew wouldn't work. So we sat down and shouted at each other for a bit, but you know we've got a very good relationship now.

HM: Talking about the sort of person that becomes a leader of an academy, do you think there's a range of things that Principals or Principal Designates of Academies are faced with that perhaps heads of other schools aren't? I mean you were head of another school for a very long time.

MW: Erm, well it is that issue of dealing with a sponsor, which is a challenge. It's also ensuring that the administration of the academy is effective without recourse to the support role that an LEA can offer. So making sure that you've got people in place who can run the show , run the payroll run the contracts…or run the HR, so you can do what you're paid to do which is improve standards and not get embroiled in finance or whatever. So it's important I think that the principal employs good people to take that responsibility. Get that bit right, you need to be running corridors and going into lessons. Also keeping the press off your back to save the morale of the kids and the staff. The press will get bored in a few years time though and move on to hammer some other aspect of education, but the damage done in the meantime can make or break a school.

HM: In terms of your strategic and your operational role then that leads on quite nicely, what would you say is the balance between your strategic and operational...?

MW: Well strategically you know I'm very committed to principles of academies because I believe you know, that schools improve from good headship, good leadership, good teaching, good teachers in those schools and LEAs in my view are not really required for that to happen, so therefore I think if independence means it gives greater autonomy and freedom to people like me to bring about change and improving, all well and good and the extra money that follows that is also good as well. So while I'm a great believer in the academy's principle, therefore the Education Act and Trust Schools etc. I'd like to see this as another academy that's really worked, so strategically I want to be part of its growing remit on Academies, Trust Schools call them what you will. So um it's important that we get it right here and elsewhere. Operationally, I'm doing the same thing as I've always done. Try and recruit the best people possible.

HM: So from your experience, what do you think the longer term skills and requirements are for leading this Academy or academies in general, because I mean you said you're 59 now?

MW: Yeah, 60 in August.

HM: Are you planning on going on longer, I mean I don't know, I mean you don't need to answer that question because its not quite relevant but the point is, you know in the next three years if 60 were the retirement age in the next three years, you'll be one of the longest...

MW: Well I'm going to go on for as long as I possibly can, I enjoy headship. I don't particularly want to be an inspector or anything like that, so I would do... I'd like to see

them get to Year 11 because I'll be 63 then. Um so but the long term future for academies is recruiting and keeping good heads...

HM: Now how does one sustain it, how does one actually transfer those skills when you're somebody like yourself who is knighted for the work in your previous school and you have the reputation and people will follow that anyway, how can you manage that period of transfer?

MW: Well part of my responsibility is succession planning I think, and if we've got people here who can step into my shoes who can carry on so much the better. But I also think it's a huge responsibility on the part of the National College for School Leadership and others to ensure that we're going to bring people who are really good it's a bit ad hoc, a bit haphazard. We've had lots of training programmes there needs to be much more focus. We've got fast track teachers why not fast track them through all the way to headship, that's the idea but the way we do it, the way we organise it needs to be looked at. In September I'm having a Future Leader here whose going to be seconded from their present school, paid for by the NCSL to be here so that I can mentor them and get them through to vice principal position. But if we were a public company or we were a limited company whatever, if we were in the private sector and we were a large organisation somebody would be saying and my junior executive, he's got all what it takes, let's see... let's move him, you know fast track him through, make sure he's done the right courses, make sure we really professionally develop him for the top job and I think we don't do that very well, so there should be a couple of people that we are fast tracking through and making sure, and this is the bit that we don't do so we then have to go through all that nonsense of open competition and um putting people through a couple of interviews and giving them the job. We should say to a governing board I'm sorry but we have four or five people here that you should look at because they've all done the same thing, they all come highly recommended and so on and so forth.

I think we should be guiding the sponsors, saying look, please don't go down this route of just for the sake of it and picking on somebody who was a head teacher in Shropshire. These are five people who, in our view, are already doing very good jobs, who we have confidence in, who can learn in a place like X or X Academy and anyone could do it but there are four people here, please don't look at x, y and z because they haven't got the experience so and so ….. [end of extract].