THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The factors helping or hindering the ability of
primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to
the medium term success of their schools

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the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
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by

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of
Bruce Jensen, Noreen Gough and Peter Gough
for their belief, support and encouragement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to understand what helps or hinders the ability of primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools, that is, over a three to five year period.

The structure of this chapter is:

A. Historical and contextual information

B. The key research question

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A. Historical and contextual information

In the past twenty years primary phase schools in England have seen many changes and new initiatives imposed by central government. These changes have included: a statutory national curriculum

introduced in 1989; regular external inspections since 1994 with four major revisions of the inspection framework; statutory testing for seven and eleven year olds with targets set and results published for a school's results of eleven year olds. The changes, which hold schools to be more accountable for pupil learning, have been fuelled by a growing dissatisfaction by the business sector of the literacy and computational skills of school leavers and a recognition that pupils in British schools, including those in England, were not achieving as well as those in parts of Europe and in other developed countries. The external environment of schools has also been characterised by increasing turbulence and uncertainty as a result of a number of social and political pressures identified by Preedy, Glatter and Wise as:

- An increase in consumerism and customer orientation, together with growing power and expectations of consumers.
- The impact of the knowledge revolution and the information age on all organisations.
- The major effects of ICT developments on organizational structures, cultures and strategies.
- Growing short-termist, profit-focused practices in both the private and public sectors.

- Increasing globalization and competition, accompanied by greater global economic turbulence.

- Growing use of private sector principles and practices in public sector organizations such as schools, colleges and hospitals.

(Preedy, Glatter and Wise 2003 p.2)

Against this background of turbulence and being held to be more accountable for their performance and spending decisions, schools have had increased autonomy in regard to operational decisions. This autonomy has been implemented by policy-makers 'to help schools and their leaders to become more responsive to these societal changes' (Barnett 2000 p.2). As Barnett (2000) and Caldwell and Spinks (1992) have described, decentralisation has become the norm with site-based management, shared decision-making and self-managing schools.

To deal with the turbulent, external environment, expectations of schools and to meet needs of future pupils, writers have argued that school leaders need to become strategic:

Firstly, in order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to have more effective strategic medium-term

planning. Secondly, it is vital if school development

planning and improvement are to be sustainable, to focus

equal attention on the planning processes of concepts

such as strategic conversations, participation and

motivation as well as to the formal documentation of

planning.

(Davies, B. 2004 p. 26)

The notion of being a strategic thinker or leader, while not new,

is vitally important as principals are forced to deal with an

increasingly complex external political environment.

(Barnett 2000 p.4)

Notwithstanding the problems involved in addressing external

demands and cultural issues, in the face of a turbulent and

uncertain environment it is essential for educational leaders

to be able to manage multiple and ongoing changes, balancing

externally initiated innovation with the organization's

own values, purposes and priorities. This entails a strategic

overview, looking at the medium and longer-term direction

of the organization, mapping out its future in an integrated

way, taking account of expected trends and developments in the environment as well as internally.

<div align="right">(Preedy, Glatter and Wise 2003 p.6)</div>

Head teachers, although they may wish to act strategically to help their schools meet agreed goals for the future and cope with turbulence and expectations, are faced with several potential problem areas. The first of these is the central government agenda, focusing the attention of schools on short-term targets and achievements (Davies 2004 p.12). The second area is day-to-day management matters described by Hamel and Prahalad:

> So the urgent drives out the important, the future goes largely unexplored; and the capacity to act, rather than the capacity to think and imagine becomes the sole measure for leadership.

<div align="right">(Hamel and Prahalad 1994 pp.4,5)</div>

In a school context Harris also describes this dilemma:

What's interesting is the demarcation between the strategic

and day-to-day maintenance. Part of the issue at a school

in difficulties is the head's inability, because of resources

and time, to look at long-term development.

(Harris 2003 p.6)

A third problematic area is that schools are relatively stable

organizations and some argue that they have changed little over the

years:

Our schools today are modelled on century-old ideals of

obedience, discipline and control. The current system is

trying to force today's children through yesterday's

sausage machine. It doesn't work and they don't like

it.

(Beresford 2004 p.38)

This view is also echoed by Fidler who adds a fourth difficulty, that of staff not having the time and opportunity to deal with long-term issues:

As a type, schools are high on stability. So many processes

are ongoing and interlocking. The curriculum is planned

to be coherent for students across a year and from year to year.

Indeed, parents expect schools to be stable places and for

many children at particular times schools may provide

one of the few points of stability in their lives. So stability

is important to schools ... Since there is so little slack

in the system, few teachers have the time to sit and ponder

the future.

(Fidler 2002 p.21)

For many schools strategy has largely been viewed as a planning process. This classical approach to strategy will be explored in the thesis and argued to be insufficient. Since the publication of guidance from the Department for Education and Science in 1989 (DES 1989), schools have increasingly been involved in the process of school development planning. With the National Standards for Head

Teachers (DfES 2004) identifying 'strategic direction and development of the school' as a role of the head teacher and the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspection framework (Ofsted 2000) including reference to longer term planning, schools have been encouraged to extend short-term plans into a three or five year costed plan. In a later version of the Ofsted inspection framework one aspect of leadership to be inspected is 'how well does strategic planning reflect the school's ambitions and goals?' (Ofsted 2003 p.116).

B. The key research question

What helps or hinders primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their school?

C. The rational and significance of the research

In the thesis it will be argued that head teachers need to take strategic actions, through demonstrating strategic leadership, in order to: lead their schools in times of turbulence and change; ensure the needs of future pupils, as well as present pupils, are met; ensure that the school is still in existence. This research will contribute to the literature and inform training for school leaders. The researcher

has worked with schools and facilitated training over the past six years in strategic planning, strategic thinking and strategic analysis. However, school leaders still comment that being able to be strategic as leaders is problematic. By identifying factors which help or hinder the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions this thesis may prove a useful tool for head teachers to consider and address the problem areas in being strategic and to ensure the medium term success of their schools.

D. The theoretical framework

The ontology of this research is constructionist as a view of leadership as a social construct will be justified. The use of the perceptions and views of head teachers and their understanding of their behaviours will set the thesis within an interpretive paradigm. Data will be qualitative as it is an understanding of words, that is, the head teachers' perceptions and views and understanding of their behaviours, rather than numbers, which is sought. The data collection approach chosen will have features of both grounded theory and phenomenology to answer the key research question and to be practical within the constraints of the research. Semi-structured interviews will be the data collection instrument. Interviews will allow

for a richness of information with interviewees sharing subjective perceptions. The analysis will be on two levels. Firstly, a subjective realist view, that is, the subjective views of the head teachers as to the factors that help or hinder them to act strategically. The second level of analysis will be a theoretical comparison with the factors identified in the literature.

E. Key terms and concepts

The use of the term **strategy** will be explored and a behavioural view of strategy argued to be appropriate for this research. The definition of strategy to mean 'a pattern of decisions and actions taken to achieve an organisations' goals' will be justified. It will be argued that strategy is witnessed in schools as strategic leaders taking strategic actions. The case for defining **strategic leadership** as the dimension of leadership that helps an organization achieve its goals will be argued. **Strategic actions** will be defined as the actions which are taken to achieve the school's medium term goals; the actions that form the bridge from the current reality to the aspirations.

F. Limitations of the research

The case for strategic leadership and strategic actions being within the remit of all of an organization's members will be acknowledged. However, the limitations of the length of the thesis and the wish to explore in depth the perceptions and experience of head teachers means that only interviews with head teachers will be sought. The head teachers in the sample will be from the primary phase from within one local education authority for reasons of accessibility, and to build on and inform the leadership training and support for schools in which the researcher is involved in her post.

G. An outline of the subsequent chapters

In chapter 2, the literature review, definitions and approaches to strategy are explored. It is argued that a behavioural approach to strategy is most appropriate for this thesis. The importance of strategy is then explored and justified and argued to be a core area of leadership. Strategy is argued to be witnessed in action as leaders taking strategic actions. Possible strategic actions are identified and finally factors that the literature suggests may help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions.

Chapter 3, the methodology, begins with a justification of the

methodological approach and assumptions. The choice of an

interpretive paradigm and constructionist ontology are justified.

Possible data collection approaches are explored and the choice of an

approach with features of grounded theory and phenomenology

justified. The reasons for choosing in depth semi-structured

interviews are explained. The ways in which validity and reliability

were sought in both the data collection process and the analysis are

explored. The chapter concludes with the timetable of research.

Chapter 4, the findings and discussion, begins with the factors found

to be helping head teachers to take strategic actions followed by the

factors found to be hindering. The subjective views of the head

teachers interviewed are explored and compared with the literature.

Six dominant helping and six dominant hindering factors are identified

and observations made on the findings. The chapter concludes with

the implications and value of the findings.

The concluding chapter, chapter 5, summarises the principal features

of the study. The chosen methodology and the theoretical model are

evaluated and reflections made on how the research might be carried

out differently if repeated. The chapter concludes with reflections on the implications of the findings for policy and practice in light of any very recent research and developments and suggestions for further research arising from this study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The focus of this thesis is to understand what helps or hinders primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools, that is, over a three to five year period.

The structure of this chapter is:

A. What is strategy?

B. Why is strategy important?

C. How is strategy witnessed in practice?

D. What helps or hinders head teachers to take strategic actions?

In each of the four areas a range of sources from both business and education literature will be explored to clarify the researcher's understanding and to inform the later comparison of the findings from the research question to the literature and views of head teachers.

A. What is strategy?

Definitions of strategy

The understanding of strategy that underpins this thesis is that strategy is 'a pattern of decision and actions taken to achieve an organization's goals' defined as such by Davies (2003b p.295). This definition encapsulates an understanding of strategy as a process which, although it involves medium term rational planning of actions, also involves actions, including dialogue and the participation of others, which emerge as a pattern after the process has occurred. It will be argued that such an understanding of strategy views it as a leadership process and not a management function. This definition has been arrived at through a study of the existing literature.

One definition may not be possible

As a number of writers in the field of strategy have written on the subject (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel 1998 p.15, Markides 2000 p.vii, Whittington 2001 p.2, Pietersen 2002 p.40) coming to one understanding of the term 'strategy' is not easy or may be not even be possible. Mintzberg et al point out 'strategy is one of those words that we inevitably define in one way yet often use in another' (1998 p.9). For example, strategy can describe a plan or a path to get from

one point to another point or the technique used to raise a company's profits or even describe consistency in approach over time, such as just aiming at the top end of the market.

Alternatively, Jones (1998) describes strategy as a discipline that answers questions for management:

> In management there can arguably be no more important questions than 'why does this organization exist and what is it trying to achieve?', 'what activities should it undertake?', 'how big should it be?', 'how can it achieve its objectives?' and so on. Strategy claims to be the discipline which deals with these kinds of questions.
>
> (Jones 1998 p.410)

Approaches to strategy

With one definition not possible writers have explored different understandings or approaches to strategy and the literature has a number of diverse lists of different schools of thought as described by Volberda and Elfring (2001 p.2). Examples of different schools of

thought on strategy include Chaffee (1985), Mintzberg et al (1998) and Whittington (2001).

Whilst acknowledging that a number of understandings of strategy are possible, three have been selected to explore in more depth. It will be argued that these three approaches to strategy, a planning view, a multi-dimensional view and a behavioural view, are evidenced in documentation and practice in relation to the leadership of schools. It is appreciated that all approaches to strategy may involve taking actions. It will be argued that a behavioural approach to strategy is most appropriate to this research as it puts actions as central to an understanding of strategy and it is head teachers' perceptions of these actions that are the focus of this research.

A planning approach to strategy

Strategy as a process primarily concerned with planning has its origins in military use as described by Pietersen:

> The word (strategy) is derived from the Greek *strategia* meaning, 'generalship', which itself is compounded from two words, *stratos,* meaning 'army', and *aegein,* 'to lead'. In

military science, *strategy* refers to the large-scale plan for

how generals intend to fight and win a war.

(Pietersen 2002 p.41)

The use of the word strategy to describe a large scale plan which

sets out the intentions on how an organisation will succeed using the

resources available is the classical approach which 'relies on the

rational planning methods dominant in the textbooks' (Whittington

2001 p.2). Writers such as Porter (1998) describe strategy as a

rational process which is designed to capitalize long-term advantage.

For those with a classical approach to strategy, good planning is

'essential to master internal and external environments (Whittington

2001 p.3). A similar definition is 'top management's plans to attain

outcomes consistent with the organisation's missions and goals'

(Wright et al quoted in Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel 1998 p.9).

In the business world the planning view of strategy emerged in the

1960's as a 'rational, top-down structured process' (Heracleous 2003

p.16). In schools a planning approach to strategy was advocated from

the 1990's. For example, the Office for Standards in Education

(Ofsted) framework for the inspection of schools of 1995 contains an

expectation of school development planning as evidence of 'an effective strategy for development' (Ofsted 1995 p.104). In the researcher's experience, many school leaders interpreted this as adding three to five year plans onto the traditional short term school development plan. However, just as Mintzberg (1978) and Hamel and Prahalad (1994) criticised the traditional planning approach to strategy being insufficient in the business world, the criticisms of this approach are also valid in the educational field. The traditional planning approach presupposes the environment is predictable, is exclusively a top-down process and ignores the role of strategies that emerge over time. Schools too in the 21st century face an unpredictable environment and are unable to plan all aspects of school development over a three to five year period which a traditional approach to strategy as rational long term planning advocates. However, it will be argued that a rational planning approach to strategy with strategic actions planned in advance is possible where the environment is predictable.

A multi-dimensional approach to strategy

With the insufficiency of the planning approach to strategy critics, for example Mintzberg (1978), have argued that there are several

approaches to strategy apparent in organizations. Mintzberg et al (1998 pp.9-15) provide examples from business to illustrate five understandings of strategy (the 5 Ps): a plan; a pattern; a position; a perspective; a ploy. From the researcher's experience these five understandings of strategy are also all found in use in the statutory education field in England currently as the following examples illustrate:

1. Strategy as a plan: for example, a 3 – 5 year school improvement plan.

2. Strategy as a pattern: for example, a school which introduces a new approach to the teaching of reading based on the successful way it introduced new approaches to the teaching of writing. The approach becomes the strategy for the future.

3. Strategy as a position: for example, opening autism units in designated schools to serve the community across a whole local education authority.

4. Strategy as a perspective: for example, always first questioning the value for the pupil when considering developments or changes as this is the school's fundamental belief in the way to tackle issues.

5. Strategy as a ploy: for example, a school admitting four year olds into full time education to build the school's roll when neighbouring schools offer only part time education for four-year olds.

Whilst acknowledging that all these approaches to strategy can be found in schools, the focus of this thesis is to understand what helps or hinders head teachers to take *actions* that are strategic. Therefore, a behavioural approach to strategy will be argued to be most appropriate.

A behavioural approach to strategy

A behavioural view of strategy, as with the multi-dimensional approach, also emerged because of the insufficiency of the rational planning approach (Heracleous 2003 p.18). Heracleous refers to Mintzberg (1978) as the protagonist of the behavioural approach who described strategy as a pattern of decisions and actions at an organizational level. The understanding of the relationship between behaviour and actions is that 'behaviour is anything that an organism does involving action and response to stimulation' (Penguin Dictionary 2000 p.119). Furthermore, it could be argued that all events and actions, apart from some physical events such as the movements of

continental plates, are caused by human behaviour and behaviours are initiated by structured attitudes and perceptions.

In this behavioural approach to strategy, decisions and actions are not just rational, in the sense of being planned as a result of structured analysis, but are also the result of the changing environment, and the structures and systems of the organization as described by Heracleous (2003). In the education field a behavioural view of strategy is found in the writing of Davies who argues that it is 'possible to see strategy as a specific pattern of decisions and actions taken to achieve organizations' goals' (Davies 2003b p.295). The researcher argues a behavioural view of strategy to be valid as it is through dialogue and doing that an organization's goals will be achieved, either actions that are planned when the environment is predictable or actions that emerge as a pattern when the environment is unpredictable. This view of strategy as being achieved by dialogue and doing is argued to be a social construction of strategy by Jones (1998 p.42) which has emerged with an understanding that to make things happen in an organization involves listening, talking, creating, shaping and sharing meaning as described in an article by Pye (1995). Indeed, strategy making is about learning where 'the strategic actors,

while experimenting and discovering, learn by doing' (Pietersen 2002 p.173).

The centrality of actions to strategy

All approaches to strategy will involve actions but in this thesis *actions* are argued to be central to strategy, that is, actions taken that lead to the medium term success of schools. Head teachers take many actions every day but the actions taken related to strategy will be those that help to meet the school's intentions and ensure the school is successful in three to five years time. Eccles (1996 p.13) usefully distinguishes actions as strategy from any other actions that he describes as events, although he acknowledges that these events may later turn out to have strategic connotations.

How is this view of actions being central to strategy supported in the literature? Exploration of the literature reveals a clear link between strategy and actions. For example, Eccles and Nohria (1998 pp.60, 61) write of strategy as robust action, 'a complex system of acting and talking, a system that occasionally manifests in rational designs but that more typically has to do with action is continually pursued through this network'. Niven (2002 p.90) refers to strategy as related

to things being done, that is, actions and activities when exploring

some of the key principles of strategy. For example: leaders *acting* as

teachers and evangelists; choosing a different set of *activities* than

your rivals; *activities* being chosen to fit one another for sustainable

success (Niven 2002 p.90). The view of strategy being used to

describe activities or ways of achieving goals is paramount in the

National College for School Leadership (NCSL) consultation document

on national standards for head teachers. For example, the document

lists under desired knowledge 'strategies for raising achievement and

achieving excellence' (NCSL 2004 p.5), 'strategies to promote self and

team development' (NCSL 2004 p.6) and 'strategies for communication

both within and beyond the school' (NCSL 2004 p.4).

Two aspects of strategy involving actions: strategy involving rational

medium term planning of actions; actions which form a pattern as

strategy emerges in turbulent times

The definition of strategy in this thesis encapsulates an

understanding of strategy as a process involving firstly, medium term

rational planning detailing actions when the environment is predictable

and secondly, actions, including dialogue and the participation of

others which form a pattern when strategy emerges because of turbulence. These two aspects of strategy will now be explored.

1. Strategy involving medium term rational planning of actions.

This classical approach to strategy is concerned with strategy as a rational plan that reduces uncertainty with the key activity of the leaders being to formulate that plan based on knowledge and experience. Such a plan contains the actions to take place to achieve the desired outcome. This classical approach to strategy is ascertained by Whittington (2001 p.2) to be the dominant one in the literature. The relevance to such rational planning in order to achieve an organization's goals is also captured in Wright's definition of strategy as 'top management's plan to attain outcomes consistent with the organization's missions and goals' (Mintzberg et al 1998 p.9). Such planning is very appropriate when the future being planned for is determinable or predictable. Pietersen defines this rational planning approach to strategy as the 'ready, fire, aim' approach which works well in 'a relatively linear, stable, and predictable environment' (Pietersen 2002 p.211). For a school this might be a three-year redecoration plan or projected staffing costs with staff moving up the national incremental scale.

2. Strategy in turbulent situations, with actions that form a pattern in retrospect.

As Boisot (1995 p.37) argues, organisations today are subject to much turbulence and such rational planning is not sufficient or indeed possible for all aspects of an organisations' work. Boisot (1995) identifies four types of response to turbulence: strategic planning, emergent strategy, intrapreneurship and strategic intent. A strategic leader may use one of these approaches faced with different situations. A strategic leader can use strategic planning when the environment is predictable and strategies can be planned in a systematic, rational way. A strategic leader can employ emergent strategy when adjustments need to be made to the planned strategy as new information is revealed. Boisot (1995 p.40) argues that emergent strategy is useful when both turbulence and the organization's understanding of what needs to happen are low. In a school context the demand for schools to implement a major curriculum change such as the national literacy strategy may result in plans being adapted and changed as the scope and expectations of the national strategy become apparent. Intrapreneurship is applicable when turbulence is high and the organization's understanding of what to plan is low. Davies and Ellison (1999 p.53) describe how head

teachers may have used this approach when faced with the

implementation of all the subjects of the national curriculum in the

late 1980's and they allowed each curriculum leader to plan the

implementation of their subject. Only later were the school leaders

able to look at and comprehend the whole picture of the national

curriculum.

Boisot puts forward the case for strategic intent as 'a process of

coping with turbulence through direct, intuitive understanding,

emanating from the top of a firm and guiding its effort' (Boisot 1995

p.44). Davies and Ellison (1999) have valuably developed the idea of

strategic intent in a school context helping school leaders to plan

where both turbulence and understanding are high. For example,

developing a culture of independent technology-based learning in

which, over a three to five year period, staff and pupil information

technology skills, knowledge and confidence are built although the

exact nature of the ICT needs in the future are not clear. Hamel and

Prahalad capture one advantage of such strategic intent as follows,

'strategic intent provides consistency to short term action, while

leaving room for reinterpretation as new opportunities emerge' (Hamel

and Prahalad 1989 p.63).

Strategy in turbulent times needs to be concerned with absorbing

uncertainty with leaders involved actively with strategy

implementation, that is actions, and not just strategy as planning as

Boisot pictorially describes: 'the strategist is now expected to spend

less time on the bridge and more time in the boiler room' (Boisot 1995

p.35). When the situation is turbulent, actions take place which form a

pattern in retrospect. Support for this view, that such actions are not

planned in advance, is found in the writings of Whittington 2001 and

Pietersen 2002. Whittington (2001 p.57) argues that actions in

turbulent times form out 'of a mixture of analysis and instinct, routine

and spontaneity, top and bottom, fortune and error' and Pietersen

(2002 p.211) describes a 'ready, fire, steer' approach with the actions

being decided, and even altered, as the situation develops. Mintzberg

(1995 p.241) writes of a pattern of actions being apparent even when a

single action 'sets a precedent and establishes a pattern'. The view of

the pattern of actions being revealed over time is described by

Mintzberg and Waters (1998 p.21) as emergent strategy, that is

consistency in action over time.

In summary, the view of strategy in this thesis is: strategy is 'a

pattern of decision and actions taken to achieve an organization's

goals' defined as such by Davies (2003b p.295). This definition encapsulates an understanding of strategy as a process which involves medium term rational planning of actions when the situation is predictable, but also involves actions, including dialogue and the participation of others, which emerge as a pattern after the process has occurred in more turbulent times.

From the exploration of the term strategy it has been argued that there are a number of understandings of strategy possible, but that central to strategy are actions. Therefore, a behavioural approach to strategy is appropriate as it is the head teachers' understandings of strategic actions that are the focus of the research. These actions are either deliberately developed through rational planning when there is stability, or when there is turbulence, are actions that on reflection afterwards form a pattern.

B. Why is strategy important?

In this section the importance of strategy will be examined. The case for a strategic perspective to be a core area of leadership will be justified and the distinction between strategic leadership and operational leadership explored.

Why strategy is important

It has been argued that there are many understandings of the term

strategy. Yet as both Heracleous (2003) and Mintzberg et al (1998

p.16) point out, there are areas of agreement in the strategy field and

one area of agreement is that 'effective strategy is important for the

welfare of the organization' Heracleous (2003 p.18). The welfare or

the well being of the organization could be understood in terms of

meeting needs or being more successful than its competitors as

Johnson and Scholes' (2003) definition of strategy purports:

Strategy is the direction and scope of an organization over

the long term which *achieves advantage* for the organization

through its configuration of resources within a changing

environment, *to meet the needs of markets* and to *fulfil*

stakeholder expectations. (added emphases)

(Johnson and Scholes 2003 p.10)

The view that strategy is important to set the direction of an

organization is also echoed by Mintzberg et al (1998 pp. 16, 17) who

list this as one of four advantages of strategy. They also list three

other advantages: strategy focuses effort; strategy defines the

organization; strategy provides consistency. However, Mintzberg et al acknowledge that these four advantages can equally be disadvantageous if strategy 'keeps them going in a straight line but hardly encourages peripheral vision' (Mintzberg et al 1998 p.18). If strategy is to be effective for an organization the advantages of strategy will need to be capitalized and the potential disadvantages avoided. It is argued here, underpinned by an understanding of strategy as a pattern of actions that can be planned in advance in order to keep the organization going in a straight line when the future is predictable and actions that, on reflection, form a pattern when times are more turbulent, that strategy can indeed be a process that is advantageous for the future of the organization.

What is fundamental about strategy, and usefully summed up by Davies (2003a p.77), is that the prime importance of strategy is to meet the challenges of the future. This view of strategy clearly identifies strategy as important as it focuses on the longer term future of the organization and distinguishes strategy from the operational, which is, the day-to-day running and welfare of the organization.

Distinguishing strategic leadership from operational leadership

Strategic leadership is about transforming the school in the medium term, over a three to five year period. This is distinct from operational leadership that is short term and leads to actions in a short time frame. As Foskett (2003 p.131) points out strategic and operational leadership are 'not separate, indeed they must not be so for each must inform the other, but they represent opposite ends of the management activity spectrum'. Short term matters, for example, improving the standards of achievement of the eldest pupils currently in the school, disruptive behaviour affecting learning or concerns from parents, clearly have to be dealt with by leaders and are also necessary to 'build the trust with the public for longer term investments' (Fullan 2005 p.25). However, strategy is also an important part of leadership in order that the school can meet the challenges of the future. Therefore, leaders should have commitment to both the short term through operational leadership and the longer term through strategic leadership.

What might be the challenges of the future which strategy will help organizations and, primarily, schools deal with successfully? Three challenges have been identified.

1) *The continuing existence of the organization in the future.*

As Boal and Hooijberg (2001) argue, leaders should focus on the global in case the future of their organisation is at risk:

> Strategic leaders further need to understand the impact of changes in socio-political, economic, and technological factors. While it is said that all politics is local, strategic leaders increasingly must focus on the global, lest blind spots in their assessment of the new competitive landscape put their organisation at risk.
>
> (Boal and Hooijberg 2001 p.535)

Whilst acknowledging that school leaders will seek to ensure their school is in continuing existence, the actual control over school places and the location of schools, in the state sector, is under the control of a school organization committee of the local education authority. However, school leaders and their school communities can use the strategic process to consider how their school might meet the needs of the future. For example, the implications of the Children's Act 2004 has an expectation of much closer working with health and social

service departments at both school and local authority level and the
opportunity for extended schools.

2) Continuing change and turbulence.

Both business and schools face continual change and turbulence
including technological developments, customer expectations and
globalization. For example, central government has imposed major
curriculum initiatives on primary schools such as the national literacy
and numeracy strategies and major funding for information and
communications technology hardware, software and training all or
some of which may not have been in a school's three to five year plan.
Boisot writes powerfully that dealing with such turbulence is a vital
part of strategy:

> The major transformation in the strategic environment
> which strategy must deal with has been well documented
> and can be summed up in a single word: *turbulence.*
>
> (Boisot 1995 p.37).

Preedy, Glatter and Wise (2003 p.6) also recognise turbulence and
the uncertain environment in education and argue that leaders need a

strategic overview 'to be able to manage multiple and ongoing changes, balancing externally initiated innovation with the organization's own values, purposes and priorities' and that this involves ' looking at the medium and longer-term direction of the organisation, mapping out its future in an integrated way, taking account of expected trends and developments in the environment as well as internally'.

3) To meet the needs of future pupils

In the educational context, Caldwell identifies the need for schools to transform themselves in order to meet the needs of future pupils and indeed survive. He identifies four factors underpinning why schools need to transform:

First, the performance of significant numbers of students falls short of expectations.

Second, every scenario suggests that further change is inevitable if the institution of school is to survive in the years ahead.

Third, the technologies of learning are changing in irresistible and irreversible ways.

Fourth, each of the first three calls for new associations

between schools and other human services in the public and
private sectors – the school as a stand alone institution cannot
and should not survive.

(Caldwell 2002 p.2)

In summary, such challenges to schools and their leaders support why strategy is important. With global and national changes and turbulence in society, the schools of today will not meet the needs of pupils in three to five years time. Leaders need to be strategic to ensure their schools are able to meet those needs and, indeed, are still in existence. The argument for strategy to be understood as a leadership process, as distinct from a management process, will now be explored and the case for strategy being a core area of leadership justified.

Strategy is a leadership process

There are references in both business and education literature to strategy as a matter for management, for example, as evidenced in the titles of books by Bracker (1980) and Johnson (1987) in the business field and Fidler (2002) in education. The title of Fidler's book being: 'Strategic Management for School Development'. However,

it is being argued here that strategy is a leadership process rather than a management process.

The distinction between leadership and management has been drawn by a number of writers in the educational field including Gronn (1999) and Kotter (1990). A useful distinction between leadership and management when considering strategy is one drawn by West-Burnham (2004 p.5) with leadership described as 'path laying' and management as 'path following'. If, as has been argued, strategy is important because it helps schools to face future challenges, this is surely about 'path laying' in order to meet those future needs and taking the school in a direction to meet those challenges. Strategy is a leadership process that seeks to ensure an organization is successful over a three to five year period: the organization is still in existence, goals are achieved and the organization is transformed to meet the needs of customers, or in the case of a school, the needs of the pupils.

A core area of leadership is the strategic perspective

Writers have identified a range of leadership styles in education and these include: transactional and values led leadership (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford 2000); moral, participative,

managerial, instructional and contingent leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach 1999 pp.18, 19); instructional leadership (Southworth 2001). It is not being claimed that strategic leadership is a distinctive leadership style but a key dimension or perspective of leadership that helps to *transform* a school. The strategic perspective of leadership is concerned with vision, building capacity and sustainability and the leader's ability to 'see the school in a longer term perspective and recognize the future direction that has to be taken' (Davies 2003b p.307), and has been argued earlier, to meet the challenges of the future. Strategic leadership is understood to be a dimension of what has been identified for example, by Day et al (2000), as transformational leadership.

Currently transformational leadership, that is, leadership that 'increases the capacity of an organisation to continuously improve' (Leithwood et al 1999 p.18) is the dominant paradigm in training for school leaders. This is evidenced in the purpose of the National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) research and development on transformational leadership:

In the current context of school reform, the College

has a key role to play in supporting school leaders as

they make the transition from a school development agenda

focused upon improvement to one focused on

transformational change.

(NCSL 2003 p. 1)

In order to transform a school a key area of strategic leadership is in

recognizing the key moment for change, intervening and changing

direction so that the organization meets the challenges of the future.

To build sustainability the organization needs to overcome the issue of

eventual decline after a period of growth and move to greater

success. This is illustrated by Pietersen's interpretation of the

sigmoid curve:

Leaping to the Second Curve
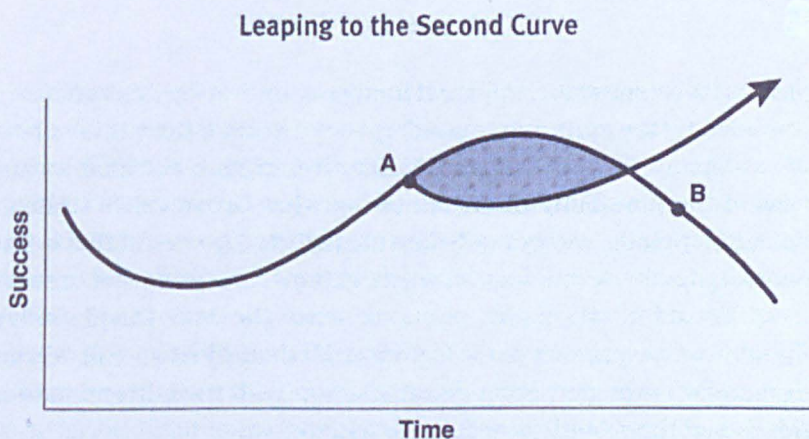
Source: Pietersen 2002 p.37

Pietersen argues that the critical time for change (the shaded area on the diagram) is when the organization is still successful. The capacity of leaders to take the right action at a critical moment is also supported by Boal and Hooijberg (2001 p.518) and by a head teacher quoted by Davies (2003b p.310): 'Strategic timing was critical; we needed to move when we had enough capacity and capability to make the change'.

Although for reasons of the length of the thesis this study is concerned with the strategic leadership, witnessed through the strategic actions of head teachers, strategic leadership is not just being advocated to be the province of head teachers. The argument for leadership to be shared in order to contribute to the future direction of the school is illustrated in the following quotation from a head teacher:

> If leadership is shared and as many people as possible given leadership roles and responsibilities, many aspects of the organization will be constantly developing at the same time

and will contribute to the overall direction and vision of

the school.

However, in contrast to this view it is interesting to note that in the

same publication the following is written:

We do not think we need many strategic leaders, but what

schools do need is many leaders who can enhance the quality

of learning and teaching throughout the school.

Whilst not disagreeing that enhancing the quality of learning and

teaching is important, strategic leadership is being argued here to be

a core area of leadership in order for schools to meet the challenges

of the future and therefore should surely be part of developing

leadership at all levels. However, this thesis is concerned with the

strategic leadership, witnessed through strategic actions, of head

teachers and further exploration of this question will deflect from

the focus.

C. How is strategy witnessed in practice?

Strategic actions: witnessing strategy in practice and defining strategic actions

With an understanding of strategy as a pattern of decisions and actions taken to achieve an organization's goals, strategic actions will be argued to be how strategy is witnessed in practice that is, the actions of leaders, in this case, head teachers.

Strategic actions are actions taken by leaders that lead to the medium term success of their schools, that is, in three to five years time and defined by Gratton (2000 p.18) as 'the specific actions which need to be taken in the shorter and longer term to bridge from reality to aspirations'. Bailey and Johnson (2001) also argue that strategic actions are about the success of the organization and also draw attention to the fact that they are not necessarily all planned in a rational way, but that some emerge in practice, as argued earlier in this thesis. Bailey and Johnson define strategic actions as:

the actions that lead to and support strategy.....(and are) concerned with how an organization, through its systems

and processes, deliberate or unintentional, achieves or

maintains its position.

(Bailey and Johnson 2001 p.212)

Strategic actions can be witnessed in three areas: visioning; learning;

structures

The literature reveals three sources of possible strategic actions:

Barnett (2000), Boal and Hooijberg (2001) and Davies (2003b).

Barnett, drawing on the work of Mintzberg (1995) and Caldwell and

Spinks (1992) identifies four strategic activities;

- Discerning the local, national, and international trends, issues,

  threats, and opportunities that can affect the school;

- Sharing knowledge with the greater school community and

  keeping them focussed on important matters;

- Setting priorities and formulating action plans for achieving

  desired outcomes;

- Monitoring the implementation of new practices and

  determining their effect on the organization and student

  learning.

Whilst useful as a starting point these activities are very broad and could be argued not to be discernibly different from any actions that may be taken for operational purposes, that is, to keep the school operating on a day-to-day basis. Davies (2003b pp.304, 305) provides a preliminary list of the characteristics of strategic leaders. Whilst not expressed in terms of actions taken by leaders they do suggest specific actions taken by leaders and will be drawn upon when identifying strategic actions later in this section. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) provide areas of strategic activity and it is from these areas that three overall areas of strategic actions, that is, those that affect the future of the organization were first identified:

Activities often associated with strategic leadership include making strategic decisions; creating and *communicating a vision* of the future; developing *key competencies and capabilities*; developing *organizational structures*, processes and controls; managing multiple constituencies; selecting and developing the next generation of leaders; sustaining an effective organizational culture; and infusing ethical value systems into an organization's culture. (added emphases)

(Boal & Hooijberg 2001, p.516)

Although Boal and Hooijberg identify a number of strategic activities it seems feasible to group them under three headings providing three areas of strategic actions:

(i) *Visioning*: creating and communicating vision; building the culture and value systems as these are fundamental to the outward manifestation of the vision of the organization; decision making as visioning could be argued to be concerned with giving clear direction.

(ii)*Learning*: developing key competencies and capabilities; developing the next generation of leaders.

(iii) *Structures*: developing organizational structures; selecting the next generation of leaders; putting in place processes and controls.

For each of the three suggested areas of strategic actions the understanding of the scope of the area and the argument in the literature for and against identifying this area will be explored. Possible specific actions will be identified in each area and justified from the literature.

Strategic actions involve visioning

Strategic actions are concerned with building a picture of what the organization aspires to be in the future and providing a clear sense of direction that everyone can understand and act upon.

Justifying that strategic actions involve visioning

The importance of leaders engaging in visioning activities with members of their organizations is found in the writings of Pietersen (2002) and Whittington (2001), and in the education field in Leithwood et al (1999). Pietersen (2002 p.62) argues that formulating a vision statement of what the organization aspires to be in the future provides 'a clear sense of direction that everyone in the organization can understand and act upon in the present'. On similar lines Whittington (2001 p.55) argues that visionary leadership is a mechanism to meet the demands of today's business world providing 'an unwavering commitment to change and a clear sense of direction'. Furthermore, he advocates that by being visionary leaders 'can give employees their sense of purpose and transform their work into play' (Whittington 2001 p. 55). The success of making changes in schools, informed initially by the clear vision of the head teacher is argued for by Leithwood et al (1999). However, it is also argued that once the

'school had begun to understand the principal's vision and its potential importance for their work, a more formal, participatory, vision-building process was initiated' (Leithwood et al 1999 p.59).

In contrast to Pietersen, Whittington and Leithwood, a different view is put forward by Stacey (1992 p.178) who argues that strongly shared visions can be detrimental to an organization and that 'innovative strategies emerge only from the continual challenging of the organizational belief system; that is, from intentional instability'. However, by identifying visioning as an area of strategic activity the importance of taking on the views of others to inform the ongoing vision and direction of the organization and so inform their actions is being argued to be important to develop the organization so that it meets the future needs as well as those of the present.

Possible strategic actions involving visioning:

1. Looks outside the organization and to the horizon

The justification for including this action is found in the work of Davies and Ellison (2003) and Barnett (2000). Davies and Ellison (2003 p.7) argue that looking outside the organization is fundamental to 'setting the direction of the organization and contrasts with the

management priority of co-ordinating current activities'. Barnett

(2000 p.4) identifies discerning trends outside the organization as one

of four strategic activities and argues that it is key so that trends,

issues, threats and opportunities for the school can be identified and

addressed. Mintzberg's definition of strategic thinking as 'seeing

ahead', 'seeing behind', 'seeing above', 'seeing below', 'seeing beside',

'seeing beyond' and significantly, 'seeing it through' (Mintzberg 1995)

also identifies the action of looking outside to support the visioning

process.

2. Links long term visions and concepts to daily work

The need for leaders to have a long term vision is found in the works

of Boal and Hooijberg (2001) and Caldwell (2002). However, Davies'

(2003b p.304) inclusion of linking the longer term vision to daily work

as a characteristic of a strategic leader suggests that actions and

decisions of strategic leaders will be informed by this vision.

Additionally, Niven (2002 p. 19) stresses that there is a need for all

initiatives to link to the overall strategic goals if the goals are to be

met.

3. Remains focused on the longer term visions

Gratton (2000 p.187) argues that one of the specific actions

necessary for the vision to be realized is 'capacity to remain focused

on the initial business theme'.

4. Develops the climate of the organization

Goleman (2002 pp. 4, 5) has argued strongly that a powerful

leadership tool is when the leader understands and improves the way

they handle their own and others emotions. Developing what he refers

to as 'emotional intelligence' can lead to better business results but

also retention of talent, higher morale, motivation and commitment.

This action has been included as a visionary action as developing a

positive climate is arguably a tool to help to achieve the vision. This

view is echoed by Hargreaves (2003 p.2) who argues that to

transform schools for the future social capital needs to be built that

includes establishing trust between a school's members and its

stakeholders. Fullan (2005 p.69) takes this development of trust a

stage further by arguing for the importance of reculturing the

organization. In the pilot interviews for this thesis, three head

teachers spoke of how developing a positive ethos was important

through a number of differing actions, appropriate to their own

contexts, and was beneficial in moving the school forward to achieve the vision.

5. Involves others in strategic dialogue as strategy involves creating meaning for all those in the school

The importance of involving others is found in much of the literature (Gratton 2000, Pietersen 2002, Davies and Ellison 2003, Davies 2004). Involving others is emphasised by writers as key because others will have knowledge, skills and understanding which can contribute to the strategic direction of the school and its success in meeting its goals as well as increasing meaning as purported by Davies (2004). Strategic dialogue is arguably part of the learning process but is included here as a visionary action as it is fundamentally about creating meaning about the possible future direction of the organization. Involving others when creating strategy is found in the work of Mintzberg et al (1998) when describing the learning school of strategy who write of 'informed individuals anywhere in an organisation who can contribute to the strategy process' (Mintzberg et al 1998 p.178). Additionally, Green when writing of the advantages of sharing leadership argues for drawing on the much wider range of knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and wisdom.

Schools are complex and challenging organisations to

lead and manage successfully. Therefore several minds

working on an issue may be better than one.

(Green 2001 p.6)

Sworder (1995 p.93) also argues that senior leaders cannot know all

that is happening and therefore involving others is vital. Kaplan and

Norton also emphasise the importance of making strategy everyone's

job as it can influence not only current behaviour but also build future

learning through dialogue (Kaplan & Norton 2001 p.1-15). Gratton

(2000 p.45) writes that part of creating an organization capable of

learning is involving others in 'deep, rich, engaging conversations' that

encourage strategic debate. Niven (2002 pp.172, 173) also points out

that as employees are the intellectual capital of the organization they

are valuable in constantly asking strategic questions.

Strategic actions involve learning

Strategic actions involve building the individual and collective skills of

people in the organization to perform at a new and higher level to

meet the needs of the organization in the future.

Justifying that strategic actions involve learning

The importance of learning to build capacity and capability to meet

the needs of the organization and ensure it is successful is found in

the writings of Pietersen (2002), Senge (1990) and Hanford (1995) as

well as Boal and Hooijberg (2001) cited previously. Pietersen (2002

p.53) writes that building capability and capacity through developing

skills is 'crucial for mobilizing the collective intelligence and creativity

of your people and for business to succeed in today's environment'.

Hanford (1995 p.150) also argues that learning is important but writes

of the learning and reflection of the leader being essential to identify

issues and opportunities for the organization. Boal and Hooijberg

recognize that a strategic leader not only engages in learning for him

or herself but also creates 'an organizational context within which

learning takes place' (Boal and Hooijberg 2001 pp.516, 517). Senge

(1990) recognizes such a context for learning with learning at all

levels as a learning organization. He describes the importance of

establishing such an organization so that the vision of the future can

be realised as follows:

learning organizations ... where people continually expand

their capacity to create the results they truly desire,

where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to live together ... It is no longer feasible to have one person learning for the organization ... the organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization.

(Senge 1990 pp.3, 4)

In the education field the importance of creating schools as learning organizations in order to meet future, as well as present needs, has been argued to be key by writers including Fullan (2001 & 2005), Leithwood and Louis (1998) and Sergiovanni (2001). As Fullan (2005 p.23) argues, schools in which learning at all levels takes place are ones where learning is directed to the future, that is, to sustainable improvements.

Possible strategic actions involving learning:

1. *Builds capabilities which contribute to the strategic map of the future state and dimension of the organization*

Davies (2003b p.312) writes that leaders should build and develop competencies and capability 'to underpin all activities to prepare for the future'. Other writers also argue for the importance of leaders building the capacity of the staff. Gratton (2000 p.187) argues for the ongoing building of the capacity to change by developing new skills and knowledge. Niven (2002 p.16) also stresses the importance of professional development and identifying gaps in employee skills necessary to achieve the desired results.

2. *Uses powerful professional and organizational learning networks; builds strategic alliances*

Apart from changing the verb from 'has' to 'uses' to make this an action, the first part of this is taken straight from Davies' (2003b p.308) list of characteristics of strategic leaders. It is supported in the literature by Boal and Hooijberg who emphasise the importance of exploring 'the strategic plans of other organisations in their own and related industries' (Boal and Hooijberg 2001 p.537). Caldwell argues that school leaders being involved in knowledge networks can help to guide decision making and priority setting (Caldwell 2002 pp.18 – 20). Fullan (2005 p.44) writes that networks can 'increase leaders' capacities to see wider and further' and also points out that

collaboration can also do this. Such collaboration could be referred to as strategic alliances. Stiles (2001 p.129) points out that research suggests that such alliances may benefit by the pooling of resources and/or capabilities and can have a strategic advantage.

3. *Use opportunities to think, learn, reflect and apply learning to new ends*

A number of writers, for example Rhodes (1995), Green (2001) and Stoll 2000), stress the importance of strategic leaders using time to think, learn and reflect. For example, Rhodes who argues:

> The most strategic action you can take is to choose to think and not to do. Thought is essentially strategic in that it sets the direction of all physical energies.
>
> (Rhodes 1995 p.93).

Rhodes (1995 p.96) further argues that it is essential to use the thinking process to rehearse actions before putting resources and results at risk. Green (2001 p.2) also argues that school leaders should make quality time available for strategic thinking to reflect on the possible implications of medium and long term changes. Stoll

(2000 pp. 5, 6) stresses the importance of reflection for leaders to analyse their actions, decisions or the outcomes. By focusing on the process of achieving the outcomes learning takes place that can then be applied to new situations.

4. *Has adaptive capacity and flexibility; coaches, bargains, manoeuvres, makes adjustments*

The ability to change one's actions and to be flexible in order to be a strategic leader is supported by Boal and Hooijberg who write that 'the organisation's ability to change requires that the leaders have cognitive and behavioural complexity and flexibility' (Boal and Hooijberg 2001 p.517). The argument for school leaders being flexible and being able to change their actions is further supported by the research by the consulting firm Hay McBer as described by Goleman (2000). This research found that leaders who got the best results used a variety of leadership styles and switched flexibly between styles. Whittington (2001 p.113) argues that 'strategic change is a matter of political manoeuvring as well as the changing of people's minds' and further (2001 p.116) that achieving strategic change is a process of coaching, bargaining, manoeuvring. Bell (2002 p.13) stresses the need for constant adjustments and therefore, flexibility.

Strategic actions involve developing staffing structures.

Strategic actions are about aligning the organization by developing an organizational structure that will enable the vision to be realised.

Justifying that strategic actions involve developing staffing structures

Developing organizational structures, including making appointments, is identified by Boal and Hooijberg (2001 p.516) as one of the actions of strategic leaders. In the literature (Stoll 2003, Fullan 2005, Collins 2001) developing the staffing structure by adjusting the present structure and by making appointments is identified as being important to achieve the vision for the future of the organization. Supporting the importance of meeting the needs of the future by changing staffing structures, Pietersen (2002) and Harris, Day, Hopkins, Hadfield, Hargreaves and Chapman (2003), write of 'aligning' the organization. Harris et al (2003 p.19) argue that what is centrally important in post-transformational leadership is 'the cooperation and alignment of others to the leaders' values and vision.'

Possible strategic actions involving structures

1. *Adjusts or changes the structure*

Adjusting or changing the staffing structure is identified by Boal and Hooijberg (2001 p.516) as a strategic action. Stoll (2003 p.101) also recognizes that changing structures to effect change is important but notes that it is important to attend to the culture as well as the structure. This view is supported by Fullan (2005 p.69) who writes, 'structure is not enough ... you have to couple reculturing and restructuring.' Pietersen (2002 p.141) also recognizes that to align the organization, that is, everyone working towards the agreed goals may require making changes in the way the organization is structured.

2. *Makes appointments*

Pietersen (2002 p.141) points out that recruiting new staff may be necessary to align the organization. Gratton (2000 p.103) also stresses the importance of making appointments, 'the recruiting of talent from the external labour market is the most crucial first step to building the base of the organization'. Collins (2001 p.13) argues very strongly for making new appointments and warns that this may involve getting 'the wrong people off the bus' and the 'right people on

the bus' as the right people are the most important asset to the long term success of the organization.

Summary of section C – how strategy is witnessed in practice

In this section it has been argued that strategy is witnessed in practice by leaders taking strategic actions, that is, actions that lead to the medium term success of their organizations. Three areas of strategic actions have been identified: visioning; learning and staff structures and within each of these areas specific strategic actions have been identified. The three possible areas of strategic actions will be used to inform the scope of questioning in the interviews with head teachers. In the next section the literature will be explored to identify what might help or hinder leaders to take strategic actions, the focus of this thesis.

D. What helps or hinders head teachers to take strategic actions?

The purpose of this thesis is to understand what helps or hinders primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools. As previously stated this is an area that, as far as the researcher has been able to ascertain, has not been the focus of research. There is very limited direct reference in

the literature to such factors. Thus, this paper will contribute to the literature and to professional development for school leaders. The factors that emerge from the literature are not necessarily just related to affecting the strategic actions taken by the leader, in this case the head teacher, but the scope and length of this thesis means that the research will be limited to the views and experiences of head teachers.

Factors which assist, or hinder, head teachers' ability to act strategically are potentially any which help, or prevent, their school being successful in the medium term, that is, in three to five years time. Factors relating to personal characteristics and traits may well be pertinent to the ability of head teachers to act strategically. However, as stated in the introductory chapter, this thesis will focus on the factors within the school setting, i.e. factors relating to the context of the schools.

A previous small-scale piece of research (Jensen 2003) identified a number of factors that facilitated and inhibited the ability of head teachers to act strategically. The factors facilitating the ability of head teachers to act strategically were:

- The availability of *staff* and governors with appropriate skills and capabilities;

- The availability of *funding*;

- The school's *knowledge* of its strengths and areas for development;

- The *knowledge* of the head teacher including opportunities to network and learn from other colleagues.

The lack of any of these facilitating factors was identified as inhibiting and in addition the following inhibiting factors were identified:

- The effect of *change*; unpredictability of the school environment with many government initiatives and short time scales for implementation;

- A belief in need for stability although not standstill;

- The day to day needs of the school including the head teacher's instructional role in improving the quality of teaching and learning;

- Lack of *time*.

Although this was from a small sample and was only one aspect of the findings, five possible areas emerged (words in italics) which might

help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions: staff; funding; knowledge; change; time. These initial findings were used to search the literature, although it should be noted that in the literature there is little, if any, direct reference to strategic actions and what may help or hinder them. There, is however, reference to factors that affect the ability of leaders to take their organizations forward.

From the literature research, informed by the earlier research, five areas or force fields and a number of factors within each area were first identified as helping or hindering head teachers to take strategic actions. After the first four interviews a sixth area was added, external accountability, and some additional factors were also identified. The resulting six force fields and helping/hindering factors are as follows:

6 force fields/ area: and possible helping / hindering factors

Area:	Helping factor +.............................-Hindering factor

+continuum-

	Helping factor +	-Hindering factor
Staffing & Personnel	*ready & motivated	*unready, not motivated
	*available	*unavailable
	*positive relationships	*negative relationships
	*able to build skills	*unable to build skills
	*able to make appointments	*unable to make appointments
	*able to align	*unable to align
	*makes opportunities for strategic conversations	*unable to make opportunities for strategic conversations
	* staff who take on responsibilities	* staff do not take on responsibilities
Resources	*funding available	*funding unavailable
	*knowledge of	*lack of knowledge of
Time	*available	*unavailable
	*able to focus on strategic medium term goals	*operational issues take precedence
Change	*able to respond to change	*unable to respond to change
	*environment predictable	*environment unpredictable
	*initiatives manageable	*initiative overload
Knowledge & Experience	*head teacher uses previous experience	* head teacher does not use previous experience
	* head teacher has knowledge of appropriate timing	*head teacher does not have knowledge of appropriate timing
	* head teacher builds/ reflects knowledge through networking	* head teacher does not build/ reflect knowledge through networking

*staff have knowledge of school's strengths & weaknesses	*staff do not have knowledge of school's strengths & weaknesses

External Accountability
* Ofsted is a positive factor   *Ofsted is a negative factor

*DfES requirements are positive factor   * DfES requirements are a negative factor

*LEA requirements are positive factor   * LEA requirements are a negative factor

Each of the six areas is understood as a 'force field' within which content, level, or various factors may change in ways that help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions. It is acknowledged that each of the areas or combinations of the areas may interact with each other. For example, resources could have an adverse effect on staffing if there are insufficient funds to appoint the experienced staff thought necessary to move the school forward or time and change may interact if there is too little time because of initiative overload which forces the school into change it had not anticipated.

It may not be a question of these factors in each area being present or absent but each being on a continuum of level or degree of intensity of presence or absence. Each of the six areas will now be explored

from the literature to justify how these areas and their possible

helping or hindering contributing factors have been identified.

Staffing & Personnel: Availability of appropriate staff; able to

appoint staff; readiness of staff; positive relationships; building skills

of staff

To meet the organization's or school's goals having key staff available

who can help the organization meet those goals is clearly important as

Pietersen writes:

> It (the organization) needs to build the competencies
>
> required to support the new strategy. This often involves
>
> recruitment, training, and job rotation. Sometimes, hard
>
> decisions must be made about the need for layoffs.
>
> (Pietersen 2002 p.143)

Echoing Pietersen's view that hard decisions may need to be made,

Collins (2001 p. 41) argues strongly that getting the right people 'on

the bus' (and the wrong people off the bus) was paramount in the

organizations they researched which were highly successful. However,

it may be a case of developing the current staff by building their

skills. As Davies argues professional development which builds strategic capabilities, such as the ability to work as a team or a fundamental understanding of teaching and learning, will enable the school to 'respond both to an event emerging from an unknowable future, and to a future desired state as yet not clearly defined' (Davies 2002 p.200). This links with Davies and Ellison's work (1999) previously referred to on developing strategic intents when the future is not predictable and detailed strategic plans are not appropriate. Garratt (1995) argues that skills in strategic thinking and strategic mapping are also essential. Green (2001 p.6) advocates using the skills and capabilities of staff and governors by sharing the leadership roles. He gives a number of reasons: it draws on a wider range of knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and wisdom and it gives a clear signal about the school as a learning community.

The recruitment and retention of staff was perceived by primary head teachers in the researcher's previous small-scale piece of research (Jensen 2003) as a major stumbling block to a head teacher's ability to act strategically. Not only was recruitment and retention difficult but staff illness was also identified as an issue. From the pilot interviews the motivation of staff also emerged as a

helping or hindering factor concerning strategic actions. The first

head teacher spoke very strongly of strategic actions being possible

because the staff had a 'can do' attitude. In contrast the head

teacher in the second pilot interview talked of the barriers to taking

strategic actions to move the school forward initially because the

staff had a 'we can't do it in this school attitude' . The importance of

relationships amongst staff also emerged in the pilot interviews as a

helping or hindering factor. The second head teacher described how

important it was 'to build up a team spirit that hadn't been in the

school and developing that team work ... that again is what accelerated

progress'.

Staffing & Personnel: Aligning staff

Whilst not referring specifically to the strategic actions of leaders,

Pietersen argues 'for any strategy to succeed, it is essential that all

of a company's business system be effectively aligned in support of

that strategy' (Pietersen 2002 p.131). He describes how the

competencies and motivation of people as well as the culture, that is,

the shared beliefs and behaviours, of the staff have to be aligned.

Senge (1990 p.234) also argues that when people are aligned additional

benefits are made with the energies of individuals harmonizing and less energy being wasted.

In a school context having a governing body which is also aligned to the future and the school's goals will also be important if the head teacher is to be able to act strategically, as the governing body is responsible for setting aims and objectives, policies and targets. The law in England gives the governing body responsibility for fulfilling a largely strategic role and they are charged with:

> The governing body shall establish a strategic framework
> for the school by-
> a) setting aims and objectives for the school
> b) setting policies for achieving those aims and objectives
> c) setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives
>
> (The Education (School Government) (England)
> Regulations 2000 p.2)

An effective governing body was summed up in an article as follows:

When the governing body works well, it does not simply react to issues in school or ideas raised by the head, but looks to the future.

(Hastings 2004 p.13)

In previous research (Jensen 2003) head teachers identified that some governors did not have sufficient understanding and knowledge of the school system or the school itself to be able to help the head teacher move the school forward strategically. The need for more training for governors and to reduce governor turnover in some schools was identified as ways forward with this issue.

Staffing & Personnel: Opportunities for strategic conversations

Taking opportunities to debate the future challenges for the school, and how these should be tackled, could be argued to be part of creating a climate for learning in the school as an organization and thus will help to inform the head teacher's strategic actions. The role of the head teacher in creating a climate where everyone is a learner and whereby the agreed goals are achieved has been argued to be part

of a strategic leader's task in section C of this chapter. Senge powerfully defines such a learning organization as one where:

> People continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective, aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.
>
> (Senge 1990 p.3)

Fullan (2004 p.8) argues that deep learning is necessary for a school to be sustainable in the longer term and that 'deep learning means collaborative cultures of inquiry which alter the culture of learning in the organization away from the dysfunctional and non-relationship toward the daily development of culture that can solve difficult or adaptive problems'. However, Perkins (2003) also points out that regressive action can occur when there is poor knowledge exchange and weak social cohesion because this is easier than trying to create a more progressive, complex culture.

Strategic conversations are about harnessing and building *collective* skills in a collaborative culture. The case for holding strategic conversations is argued strongly by Davies and Ellison:

> ... schools which can sustain improvement over a period of time not only have plans which are strategic but they (leading practitioners) engage in the art of strategic conversations. It is as important to build a dialogue around strategy and a perspective of strategy as it is to have actual strategic plans. If a strategy is to work, the intellectual resources of the organization must contribute to the interpretation of the data and, in doing so, gain ownership and be able to be committed to the strategic direction which the school chooses.
>
> (Davies and Ellison 2003 p.50)

Collins (2001 p.114) also argues that 'vigorous dialogue and debate' is an essence of the process of moving an organization forward. However, Collins, rather than advocating wide participation in strategic conversations as advocated by Davies and Ellison, suggests the use of a council consisting 'of a group of the right people who

participate in dialogues and debate ... about vital issues and decisions

facing the organization' (Collins 2001 p.115). However, who decides who

the right people are? Surely to use the intellectual resources available

as many people as possible should be involved in strategic

conversations?

As well as creating the culture in which debate conversations of a

strategic nature can take place there also has to be the time available

for this to happen. As cited previously, in earlier research (Jensen

2003) time was identified by head teachers as a limiting factor

because of other competing demands.

Staffing & Personnel: staff taking on responsibilities

Hopkins and Jackson argue that by giving others responsibility,

through distributing leadership, it is possible to 'grow and to expand

the capacity of schools to manage multiple change' (Hopkins and

Jackson 2003 p.102). This view is supported by a head teacher who

argues that by distributing leadership others can influence the longer

term direction of the school:

I believe it is through effective leadership that

organizations grow and develop – management

is merely maintaining the current system. If leadership

is shared and as many people as possible given leadership

roles and responsibilities, many aspects of the

organization will be constantly developing at the same time

and will contribute to the overall direction and vision.

(Head teacher, NCSL 2004a p.15)

In the same publication (NCSL 2004a p.7) the case for giving staff

leadership responsibilities is also supported as the head teacher can

have influence in terms of impact on education, rather than just on

visible status as the school was able to do more things simultaneously,

and the head teacher was freed up to think and plan over the longer

term.

Resources: Availability of funding; knowledge of funding

As well as the inhibiting factor of time, funding was also identified in

the researcher's earlier research as affecting a head teacher's ability

to focus on the medium term success of the school. Since the

introduction of the local management of schools in England and Wales

in the late 1980's schools, under the leadership of the governors and head teacher, have had responsibility for the use of much of the funding devolved to them. Although in theory schools have control to ensure that funding is used to support their own goals and targets, two issues arise. Firstly, much of the funding is ring fenced, for example the Standards' Fund to support the implementation and effectiveness of the national literacy and numeracy strategies. Secondly, there is also concern about the sufficiency of funding. As an article in the Times Educational Supplement states 'school budgets in one in four local education authorities will rise barely enough to keep up with inflation and rising pay costs next year, new government figures reveal' (Adams 2002). But in order to take strategic actions that have longer term implications head teachers need to have knowledge that funding will be sustained. David Hart, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, claimed in an article in the Times Educational Supplement in 2005, 'the issue is not just funding this year or next year - it is about sustainability for future years' (Walsh 2005 p.8). This quotation illustrates the need for head teachers to be able to forward plan having the knowledge of funding available. With an increasing use of bidding for funding, head

teachers also require understanding of the streams of possible

funding.

Time: Availability; ability to focus on medium term issues and

operational needs not taking precedence

The ability of head teachers to have a focus on the school's three to

five year goals and take actions which ensure the school can achieve

success is also adversely affected by the many demands on head

teachers as illustrated by Leithwood:

Leaders can be excused for feeling they are being pulled

in many directions simultaneously. They are being pulled in

many directions simultaneously.

(Leithwood 2001 p.228)

Wide ranging reforms, including the local management of schools,

published inspections reports and league tables of pupil results in

statutory tests, have made schools more autonomous and more

accountable and may cause head teachers to believe they are pulled in

many directions. Preedy et al list the various stakeholders to whom a

school is accountable as parents, governors, education authorities,

central government inspectorates, local communities and business

interests (2003 p. 80). However, they fail to mention the school's

accountability to its pupils who should perhaps have been listed first.

As Preedy et al argue a leader will need to balance 'competing

accountability demands based on different values and expectations'

(2003 p.8). For example, imposed targets may clash with wanting to do

the best for lower achieving pupils.

It is acknowledged that not only longer term goals are important; a

head teacher will need to have a commitment to both short-term and

longer-term results. As Fullan (2004 p.8) argues, schools set targets

and take action to obtain early results, intervene in situations of

problematic performance and ensure capacity building takes place. He

argues this is necessary because:

> It's a pipedream to argue only for the long-term
>
> goal of organizations or society, because the shareholders
>
> and the public won't let you get away with it. The new
>
> reality is that governments and organizations have to show
>
> progress in relation to priorities in the short-term as well
>
> as long-term. Our knowledge base is such that there is no

excuse for failing to design and implement strategies

that get short-term results. Of course, short-term

progress can be accomplished at the expense of the mid

to long-term (win the battle, lose the war), but they

don't have to be.

(Fullan 2004 p.8)

However, the ability of the head teacher to stay focused on the

school's goals, despite competing demands, is supported by Pietersen

(2002, p.143) who writes that for an organization to succeed people

need to be focused. In the school context Davies and Ellison (1999

p.50) argue that a strategic plan in the format they describe can

provide a clear agenda for a school, a clear focus. Thus when a

member of staff requests to attend a course or conference the head

teacher can appropriately ask how this will contribute to the school's

agreed strategic aims and activities.

A head teacher's ability to stay focused will also be affected by the

amount of time spent on day-to-day management issues. Southworth

(1998) found that at best many primary head teachers spend 80% of

their time on management and only 20% on leadership matters. If this

is the case then the ability to stay focused on the school's goals will be adversely affected. The operational needs of the school taking time away from being able to focus on longer term issues was cited by head teachers in the researcher's previous research.

Change: Ability to respond to change; manageability of initiatives; predictability of the environment

Being able to respond to change can be viewed as very difficult for head teachers as schools, and for the purpose of this paper *primary* schools, have had many changes thrust upon them in the past ten years often at relatively short notice and little consultation including: a statutory national curriculum; regular OFSTED inspections with four different inspection frameworks in the past twelve years; national literacy and numeracy frameworks; extensive assessment and testing. Indeed, Fullan (2005 p. 21) states that education and the public service do not suffer from too few innovations, 'but rather too many ad hoc, unconnected, superficial innovations'.

Head teachers in the previous small-scale piece of research (Jensen 2003) cited initiative overload, Ofsted inspections and a belief in a need for some stability as factors inhibiting them from being able to

respond to change or even to anticipate change. One head teacher summed up this as follows: 'as head teacher you are always striving for the next thing, but restlessness is different – there are so many government initiatives that 90% of head teachers long for stability and want to get initiatives embedded' (Jensen 2003 p.16).The unpredictability of local education authority admissions or late appeals was also cited by head teachers as affecting their ability to anticipate change.

When faced by so many changes and innovations the danger is that 'the urgent drives out the important; the future goes largely unexplored' (Hamel and Prahalad 1994 pp. 4, 5). Such changes could all have a negative impact on the school's ability to engage in visioning and achieve its agreed goals, and have medium term success. Whilst, as already argued, leaders should be taking account of local, national and global agendas, the role of building capabilities to meet strategic intents, as described by Davies and Ellison (1999 p.101), when there is turbulence is relevant here. Some flexibility is important but the school working towards its agreed goals for three to five years will help the school to ensure that it does move forward strategically. Where it is felt necessary the school can adapt, or in some cases

perhaps even refuse to change, in response to an externally imposed

agenda. The evidence from ongoing school self-evaluation, supported

by the analysis of external data, can help the school to be accountable

and to justify its own improvement agenda. This is part of the

scanning and strategic analysis process so that it is possible to 'form a

view of the key factors which will influence the school in the medium

term' (Davies and Ellison 2003 p.49).

Pietersen argues for the importance of organizations being adaptable

to ensure that they succeed and can renew themselves to meet

changes:

> As I have argued, today's primary leadership challenge is to
>
> create and sustain an adaptive enterprise. In the current
>
> business environment, I believe this is the *only* sustainable
>
> advantage. It is not a product or a service; those things have
>
> a short shelf life. Rather, it is an *organizational capability.*
>
> By definition, an adaptive enterprise is one with the built-in
>
> ability to renew itself over and over again. This is important

because, as we've seen, to win once is not enough; you must

be able to *go on* winning.

(Pietersen 2002 p.51)

Such an adaptable organization will need an adaptable leader, one who

is prepared to take risks, experiment and learn from mistakes. As the

3M company philosophy states, 'try a lot of things and keep what

works' (quoted by Pietersen 2002 p.179) As described earlier being

able to 'ready, aim, steer' rather than 'ready, aim, fire' is important to

keep on course towards the schools' goals but manoeuvring when

necessary.

It can also be argued that much of the school environment is

predictable and therefore, a leader knows what is coming. As Davies

and Ellison (1999, p.50) argue strategic planning is useful for 'the

more predictable and controllable elements within the planning

processes, especially when these are incremental and linear and where

a good understanding of the detail is possible.' From the researcher's

experience examples of such predictable elements would be the pupil

numbers in many primary schools that only vary by five pupils in each

year group, a plan to refurbish the school premises on a rolling

programme or the continuing professional development of staff including the induction of new members of staff.

Knowledge and experience: The head teacher's previous experience; the head teacher's knowledge of appropriate timing

In the literature no references have been found about the positive or negative effect of a head teacher's previous experience on their ability to take strategic actions. Although not necessarily so, a head teacher should have knowledge and experience that is relevant to the school and this will be part of the selection process. Governing bodies are encouraged to use the National Standards for Head Teachers when appointing head teachers. For each of the six standards knowledge expectations are specified. For example, head teachers should know about: 'strategies for raising achievement and achieving excellence' (DfES 2004 p.7). However, the leader may well view themselves as 'the designer of learning experience – not an authority figure with solutions' (Steve Miller of Shell quoted by Fullan 2001 p.112).

Head teachers' previous experience was originally one area of coding but after the first four interviews it became clear that this needed

breaking down in to two areas: their use of previous experience and their knowledge of appropriate timing being a factor that helped or hindered them to take strategic actions. The importance of leaders being able to recognize when to take actions has already been cited in this chapter as a key area of strategic leadership and supported in the writings of Peterson (2002), Boal and Hooijberg (2001) and Davies (2003b).

Knowledge and experience: The head teacher building and reflecting on knowledge through networking; head teacher able to model practice
Head teachers in the researcher's previous small-scale research stressed how important networking with colleagues locally, nationally, and sometimes internationally, was to continue to build their knowledge and understanding. However, factors which inhibited this opportunity to network included time available and the day-to-day management of the school.

Developing strategic alliances may also be part of building a head teacher's knowledge and developing their learning to facilitate the learning of others. For example, a beacon school working with a school in a similar area to share expertise or linking with a higher educational

establishment which offers professional expertise in return for

placement of initial teacher training students. However, learning is not

just important for the head teacher or leader as Senge describes:

> learning organisations ... where people continually expand
>
> their capacity to create the results they truly desire,
>
> where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured,
>
> where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are
>
> continually learning how to live together ... It is no longer
>
> feasible to have one person learning for the organisation ...
>
> the organisations that will truly excel in the future will be the
>
> organisations that discover how to tap people's commitment and
>
> capacity to learn at all levels in an organisation.
>
> (Senge 1990 p.3, 4)

Fullan (2004 p.4 and 2005 p.18) also argues for the power of

networking as a capacity building and learning strategy for school

improvement. He cites the benefits of networking as: people learning

best from peers; fostering, developing and disseminating innovative

practices that work; leadership being developed and mobilized in many

quarters; motivation and ownership at the local level being deepened.

However, Fullan also points out the possible problems with networks:

> The downside possibilities potentially include:
>
> a) there may be too many of them adding clutter rather than focus;
>
> b) they may exchange beliefs and opinions more than quality knowledge, and in any case how can quality knowledge be achieved;
>
> c) networks are usually outside the line-authority, so the question is how potential good ideas get out of the networks so to speak and into focused implementation which requires intensity of effort over time in given settings.
>
> (Fullan 2004 p.5)

Leaders modelling practice and behaviour in order to develop and influence the practice of others is supported by findings of the National College of School Leadership (NCSL 2004 p.6) and also supported in the writings of Leithwood el al (1999). A head teacher modelling behaviour that illustrates the shared values of the school is argued by Leithwood et al (1999 p.83) to build the culture of the

school. Leithwood et al also refer to the benefits of head teachers

modelling problem-solving techniques that others can adapt for their

own work (Leithwood et al 1999 p.80).

Knowledge and experience: *Staff knowledge of school's strengths*

and weaknesses

The knowledge that a school builds up about itself is often referred

to as school self-evaluation. Part of the school self-evaluation process

is strategic analysis argued by Davies and Ellison (1999 p.60) to involve

forming a view of the key factors that will influence the school in the

medium term. This analysis involves reviewing the environment, the

school's customers, the school's product and service and the

competitors. However, in collecting what could be a vast amount of

information Barnett (2000 p.3) points out that for head teachers to

become more strategic in leading their schools 'there are important

implications for sorting a vast array of external and internal

information as they make decisions'. School self-evaluation is viewed

by some writers (Fullan 2001, Leithwood and Louis 1998, Sergiovanni

(2001) as a key part of developing a school as a learning organization

with the head teacher as lead learner. MacBeath (1999 p.1) sums up

that the primary goal of school self-evaluation is 'to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection'.

However, there is a tension between school self-evaluation and external accountability through external evaluation as recognised by Fullan (2004 p.7) and MacBeath (1999 p.5). David Miliband, then the Minister of State for Education in England and Wales, saw the future of using school self-evaluation to inform the external evaluation through inspection when he advocated in a speech:

> An accountability framework, which puts a premium on ensuring effective and ongoing self-evaluation in every school combined with more focused external inspection, linked closely to the improvement cycle.
>
> (Miliband 2004 p.6)

Miliband proposed:

> First, we will work with the profession to create a suite of materials that will help schools evaluate themselves honestly. The balance here is between making the process over-prescriptive, and making it just an occasional one-off event. In the best schools

it is continuous, searching and objective. Second (we) will shortly

be making proposals on inspection, which take full account of a

school's self-evaluation. A critical test of the strong schools will

be the quality of its self-evaluation and how it is used to raise

standards. Third, the government and its partners at local and

national level will increasingly use the information provided by a

school's self-evaluation and development plan, alongside inspection,

to inform outcomes about targeting support and challenge.

(Miliband 2004 p.8)

Sharing knowledge in an organization and between organizations

provides capacity for global competitiveness which 'demands global

best practices all the time' (Pietersen 2002 p. 181). Although as Fullan

argues:

No amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what

action should be taken. Action decisions are a combination of

valid knowledge, political considerations, on-the-spot

decisions, and intuition.

(Fullan 2003a p.196)

Sharing knowledge within an organization, if it is to be frank and

meaningful, needs to be carried out within an ethos where debate and

strategic conversations are facilitated.

Knowledge and experience: key staff able to model practice because

of previous experience

The impact of the ability of key staff who can model approaches and

practice as a helping factor for the head teacher to take strategic

actions came through in two of the first batch of four interviews. The

use of modelling by leaders clearly links to giving staff responsibility

that is, distributing leadership, and is concerned with influencing the

behaviour of others.

> Modelling is concerned with the power of example.
>
> Teachers and head teachers believe in setting an
>
> example because they know this influences pupils
>
> and colleagues alike ... Teachers do not follow
>
> leaders who cannot 'walk the talk'.
>
> (NCSL 2004 b p. 6)

The advantage of senior staff acting as role models for staff to help

provide direction for the school is also supported by Chapman (2003

p.41) and Day (2003 p.171). The latter arguing that good leaders work

alongside colleagues, in 'the thick of things'.

Extemal accountability: Ofsted inspections; central government

requirements; Local Education Authority expectations

The helping/hindering impact of the number of initiatives and the

school's ability to respond has been accounted for in the area of

change. However, from the first four interviews the helping or

hindering effect of external accountability came through as key to

the head teachers in their ability to take strategic actions. Although

schools have had increased autonomy and resources with the local

management of schools there has been an enormous increase in central

direction, control and accountability with a national curriculum, regular

published assessments and Ofsted (Office for Standards in

Education) inspections. This is central government determined

accountability but administered through different areas of central

and local government.

As Ofsted school inspection reports are published, and available on the internet, schools are held accountable for the findings (Education Act 2005 Section 5). In research carried out in 2004 it was reported that far more head teachers believed that 'the benefits of their most recent inspection outweigh the disadvantages' (Ofsted 2004 p.41) and most teachers surveyed in 2002 – 2003 reported that the inspection would help the school to move forward (Ofsted 2004 p.174). Although one of the benefits reported by primary head teachers surveyed (Ofsted 2004 p. 43) was that inspection provided a boost to the school's morale, where the findings had been positive, which could be argued to be beneficial to the school moving forward and strategic actions taking place. However, in contrast the report notes (Ofsted 2004 p.44) that some primary head teachers reported levels of stress and apprehension caused by the inspection regime and some reported post-inspection blues (Ofsted 2004 p.46) which could adversely affect the ability of the head teacher to implement strategic actions.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and its various Q.U.A.N.G.O.s (quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations) are responsible for various aspects of central government policy, particularly assessment, which involves the 3 T's: testing, tables and

targets and the national strategies. Although many would agree that a move towards higher standards in schools is necessary there are concerns about the way tests and targets and the published tables are used. Indeed testing may involve two practices that could be argued to affect the capacity of a school to move forward and achieve its longer term aims:

> Of concern are two practices – diverting time from teaching
> the curriculum to teaching pupils how to take the tests,
> especially in the months directly before the tests are given,
> and shifting time away from non-tested subjects towards
> tested subjects.
>
> <div align="right">(Earl, Watson, Levin, Leithwood,</div>
> <div align="right">Fullan and Torrance 2003 p. 137).</div>

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) introduced the national literacy and numeracy strategies to primary schools in 1999 and 2000 respectively. Although not compulsory, unlike the statutory national curriculum, they are examples of a 'high pressure, high support approach to large-scale reform' (Earl et al 2003 p.5). These two strategies merged in 2004 to become the national primary

strategy which now encompasses the literacy and numeracy strategies as well as leadership training programmes, ICT, school networks and modern foreign languages.

The influence of the local education authority (L.E.A.) has diminished in the last decade although the local authority is still charged with the possibly contradictory responsibilities of monitoring, facilitating the sharing of best practice and challenging and supporting schools causing concern (DfEE 2001 p.2). Fullan (2005) writes of the vertical relationship between the district and school level as involving support and resources but also accountability. He argues that it will be difficult to get the balance of accountability right in terms of vertical authority as 'too much intrusion demotivates people; too little permits drift, or worse' (2005 p.20). In the past few years greater responsibility for central government initiatives has been passed to local education authorities. One example reported by Earl et al (2003 p.135) to adapt and refine practice whilst remaining true to the pedagogical practices which lie behind the national literacy and numeracy strategies. Local authorities are also charged with 'policing' or monitoring on behalf of central government, e.g. schools use of standards funding and the administration of statutory tests at the

end of key stages 2 and 3. This monitoring role may be viewed as detrimental to the ability of a school to act on its own agendas in order to meet its longer term aims.

From the literature six possible areas have been identified which may help or hinder a head teacher to take strategic actions. Within these areas particular contributing factors have been identified and explored in the literature.

Summary of chapter 2: the literature review.

The concept of strategy has been examined and a definition of strategy as a pattern of decisions and actions taken in order to achieve an organization's goals justified. The importance of strategy has been examined and its role in leadership explored. A behavioural approach to strategy has been argued to be appropriate to this research as strategy is witnessed in schools as strategic actions being taken by strategic leaders. Three categories of strategic actions have been identified from the literature: visioning; learning; structures. These areas will be used to structure the data collection but it is acknowledged that further areas may emerge and the subsequent data collection method adapted accordingly.

The literature has suggested six areas which may help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions: staffing and personnel; resources; time; change; knowledge and experience; external accountability. It has been acknowledged that these areas may interact. Possible, particular factors within the six areas have also been identified with an understanding that each of these factors may have a degree of intensity, presence or absence along a continuum. The six areas and their contributing factors will be used as a starting point for the analysis of the data. However, these areas and factors will be amended in the course of the data collection process if other findings arise.

Having identified possible areas from the literature that may help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions, these findings will be tested in research. The next chapter will address and justify the chosen methodology of the data collection process and analysis for the research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The objective of this research is to understand what helps or hinders primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools, that is, in three to five years time. In this section the methodology chosen to meet this objective will be justified and explored and the reasons for not selecting other approaches or research instruments explained. The steps taken to attain robustness in the research process and analysis will be described.

The structure of this chapter is:

A. The methodological approach and assumptions

B. The data collection approach

C. The detailed data collection instrument

D. The data collection process: ethical considerations; validity and reliability

E. Piloting the data collection instrument and analysis

F. The choice of sample

G. Data recording and analysis including validity and reliability

H. Timetable of research

A. The methodological approach and assumptions

The objective of this research is to understand what helps or hinders primary head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools, that is, in three to five years time.

Although it could be argued that a quantitative approach, for example structured questionnaires with a large sample of head teachers, would provide relevant data to *identify* what helps or hinders them in taking strategic actions, a qualitative approach has been selected as it is the head teachers' *understanding* of what helps or hinders that is being researched. A qualitative approach has been selected in order to understand what helps or hinders them to take strategic actions in their own subjective terms and meanings, within the contexts of their own schools.

As it is subjective terms and meanings that are being sought a phenomenological understanding of research is appropriate in contrast to a positivist understanding. This is because the researcher is seeking to see things from the head teachers' point of view in 'order to grasp the meaning of the person's behaviour' (Bogdan and Taylor

1975 p.13). Head teachers' understandings of what helps or hinders them to take strategic actions may be detailed and subjective and these are the responses that are being sought in order to meet the research objectives. A positivist approach, in which behaviours are studied from an objective point of view with an understanding that research can be conducted in a way that is value free, is not appropriate for this research.

The choice of an interpretive paradigm

An interpretive paradigm with qualitative data is appropriate as the research is concerned with understanding the perceptions and behaviours of head teachers. An interpretive paradigm with a qualitative approach is designed to collect such data. The choice of an interpretive paradigm to research human behaviour and perceptions is described by Bryman (2001), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) and Scott and Usher (1999). Bryman (2001 p.13) identifies the *understanding* of human behaviour to be an interpretive approach in contrast to the positivist approach with its emphasis on explaining human behaviour. This research has a number of specific features: it is a small scale piece of research about the specific area of what helps or hinders leaders taking strategic actions, it is about

understanding actions; it should be of practical interest to those in school leadership positions. These features are amongst those identified by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000 p.35) as features of an interpretive paradigm. The research is about understanding the actions of head teachers and Scott and Usher's description of interpretivism also supports the argument that interpretivism is appropriate for researching understanding of human actions:

> In interpretivism, research takes everyday experience and ordinary life as its subject matter and asks how meaning is constructed and social interaction negotiated in social practices. Human action is inseparable from meaning, and experiences are classified and ordered through interpretive frames, through pre-understandings mediated by 'tradition' ... Situations are interpreted and, whilst these interpretations looked at 'objectively' may be faulty or misleading, they reveal for researchers the shared and constructed nature of social reality – and this would have been missed had the researchers been 'objective' in a positivist sense.
>
> (Scott and Usher 1999 p.25)

Reasons for a constructionist ontology

The ontology of this research is constructionist; that is, reality is constructed because people understand reality in different ways. In this research, head teachers' understanding of what helps or hinders them to take strategic actions may be different because of the context of their schools and their own understandings and experience. This is in contrast to a positivist or objectivist view when reality is 'out there' and 'social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors' (Bryman 2001 p.17). A constructionist ontology has been selected, as underpinning this research is an understanding of leadership, of which the taking of strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools is a part, as a reality which is constructed. Leadership consists of different patterns of action, of which strategic actions are one such pattern. Actions are the products of negotiations between the different parties involved; there are no set answers to problems faced each day but school leadership is about remaking solutions and adapting understandings to new situations. It is acknowledged that only the head teachers are to be interviewed for this research and not the other parties within their schools because of limited resources. Therefore, it will only be the meanings of what has helped

or hindered the head teachers to take strategic actions that will be researched rather than the views of other members of the school community.

The data collection tool seeks to enable the head teachers to describe the context from which their understanding of what helps or hinders them to take strategic actions has emerged. It is acknowledged that the head teachers' accounts may not reflect the perception of others in their schools but the research seeks to give an account of what the head teachers feel and perceive.

Two features of constructionism identified by Bryman (2001 p.18) are that the social phenomena and categories are produced through social interaction and are in a constant state of revision. This reflects the researcher's view of leadership that is about processes and interaction with others and that leadership is experienced and constructed through social interaction. This view of leadership within the context of schools is defined as constructivist leadership by Lambert and usefully described as 'the reciprocal processes that

enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead towards a shared purpose of learning.' (Lambert 2002 pp.5, 6)

In this thesis leadership is not understood as a given state or thrust upon people because of 'accident of birth, family, social class and the like' (Gronn 1999 p.186). Leadership is understood to be 'an ascribed or attributed status' (Gronn 1999 p.5). Head teachers are leaders who significantly affect an individual or a group's 'well-being, interests, attitudes, beliefs, intentions, desires, hopes, policies or behaviour' (White 1972 p.489). Fundamentally leadership 'is a form of direct or indirect, legitimately expressed influence' (Gronn 1999 p.6).

In order to achieve the objective of this research the perceptions and understandings of head teachers have been sought. Their understandings of what helps or hinders their ability to act strategically, as part of their leadership role, reflects how the reciprocal processes of leadership, as defined by Lambert (2002 pp. 5,6), have constructed meaning in their schools about the three to five year aims, the strategic actions taken, the people involved and who has influence. The reciprocal processes involved in constructing

these meanings will have included a vast range of experiences including conversations, teams reflecting on and evaluating projects, training sessions, meetings in which aims are discussed and agreed.

As an interpretive paradigm underpins this piece of research the research method chosen involves qualitative data collection and analysis. The understanding of perceptions involves understanding and analysing words, rather than numbers. The subjective accounts of those interviewed are at the forefront in this research and it is the words and the ideas behind the words that are analysed. The data collected was analysed using a coding system to infer the meanings of the words used. The analysis sought to extract both surface and latent meanings behind the words used. Notes were taken during the interviews on body language or facial expressions if they appeared relevant to the person's response to the questions in an attempt to understand latent feelings.

B. The data collection approach

Five possible qualitative approaches, identified by Creswell (1998), of data collection will be examined; biography, ethnography, case study, grounded theory and phenomenology. The choice of a mixed approach

using features of grounded theory and phenomenology will be argued

to meet the objectives of the research and to be practical within the

constraints of the research.

A biographical approach

A biographical approach would limit the research to exploring the

experiences of one person and would reflect the particular

circumstances of their school. Biography, as described by Bryman

(2001 p.316), also involves the analysis of documentation relating to

the person studied and their context. This research is seeking to

understand the perceptions of head teachers about the factors that

facilitate, or inhibit, their ability to take strategic actions rather

than information that can be sourced from documents. This research

is focussing on processes in schools and, although it will entail

discussing the head teachers' personal reflections, it is not personal

details of one head teacher that are being sought as in a biographical

approach.

An ethnographic approach

An ethnographic approach would involve studying a social or cultural

group. Although head teachers could be argued to be a social group

they each work in individual school settings which are themselves a social group thereby giving a vast number of permutations. As an individual researcher with limited time, interviewing and observing large numbers of people would be difficult and it is the perceptions of head teachers themselves that is being researched. The collection method within an ethnographic approach is primarily observations over an extended time period. Although observations with follow up interviews may have provided relevant data for this research, it would not be feasible within the time scale available and having a single researcher. Observations would not provide the data required for this research when an understanding of perceptions is being sought.

A case study approach

A case study approach would allow different perspectives about the factors facilitating the ability of head teachers to act strategically to be explored, but the length of time available and the length limit of the thesis would have only allowed a small number of case studies to be carried out. Therefore, readers may not be able to apply findings to their own situations. It is acknowledged that with only ten head teachers being interviewed readers still may not be able to apply the findings. However, a case study would provide limited in depth

information of one or two head teachers and what is being sought are the perceptions of a larger number of head teachers. As well as generalizability Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 p.184) raise two further weaknesses of case studies quoting the work of Nisbet and Watt (1984). These are:

- Case studies are not easily open to cross checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective (but this could also be argued for the interviewed within phenomenology);
- They are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity.

It is acknowledged that the chosen approach, which has features of grounded theory and phenomenology, may also be biased.

A feature of case studies is the analysis of multiple sources, for example, documents, records, interviews and observations. In seeking to understand head teachers' perceptions a single data collection method is proposed which should provide sufficient data to indicate meanings and concepts which have relevance and offer a good degree

of insight relative to the problems identified and the resources available.

The chosen approach: grounded theory and phenomenology

The approach chosen has features of both grounded theory and phenomenology. That is, in-depth interviews, a feature of phenomenology, with ten head teachers rather than interviews with twenty to thirty people in order to attempt to saturate understanding, a feature of grounded theory. Saturation may be reached with ten interviews and this will be examined when discussing the results. However, saturation may well not be possible. Even with a substantially larger number of interviews, different head teachers, although meeting the criteria set, may still have different ideas and understanding of the factors which facilitate or inhibit their ability to take strategic actions.

The ten in-depth interviews sought to explore the head teachers' 'lived experiences', a feature of phenomenology identified by Creswell (1998 p.51). The 'lived experiences' in this case were the head teachers' reflections and perceptions of what helped or hindered their ability to take strategic actions in their schools.

Although grounded theory is commonly understood to involve developing a theory from data collected, Miles and Huberman (1994 p.27) argue that 'any researcher, no matter how unstructured or inductive, comes to fieldwork with *some* orienting ideas, foci and tools'. In this research possible factors that may help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions have been identified from the literature. However, the perceptions of the head teachers interviewed may well add to the findings from the literature. It will be important to ensure that the researcher has an open approach to the data in both the collection process and analysis and that the initial findings from the literature do not bias the data collection. The steps taken to ensure the research is robust are explored in later sections.

Another feature of a grounded theory approach employed was coding in the data analysis. This enabled factors that help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions to be identified and explored. The words of those interviewed and the meaning behind the words, that is, latent as well as surface meanings, were coded. As the interviews were transcribed and coded the codes were added to or amended as deemed to be necessary from the data.

C. The data collection instrument

The key factor in the choice of data collection instrument is that it provides rich data on the perceptions of head teachers and allows for an understanding of what helps or hinders their ability to take strategic actions to be studied. The reasons for rejecting observations, questionnaires and focus groups are explored and the reason for choosing semi-structured interviews justified.

Observations

Observations may have provided data on head teachers' perceptions as it could be argued that actions may indicate perceptions. However, this data collection instrument has been rejected as observations would not allow for rich data on perceptions and understandings to be collected over the relatively short time by just a single researcher. Observations may have been appropriate if strategic actions were being researched, rather than the head teachers' understanding of what helps or hinders them to take strategic actions. It is the subjective *understandings* of the head teachers of the strategic actions, that is, the behaviours that occurred, that are being sought.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were considered as they would have had a number of advantages over interviews. Bryman lists these advantages as: they are quicker to administer; there is an absence of interviewer effects; respondents are not affected by any different ways the interviewer might ask the questions; respondents can respond to the questionnaire at their own convenience (Bryman 2001 pp. 129, 130). Furthermore a larger sample could be taken than with in-depth interviews. However, the disadvantages of questionnaires that Bryman cites over structured interviews are also relevant to the proposed in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Bryman lists the disadvantages of questionnaires as: cannot prompt; cannot probe; difficulty of asking other kinds of questions; questionnaire can be read as a whole so that none of the questions are independent; one is not sure who has completed the questionnaire; cannot collect additional information; difficult to ask a lot of questions; some questions may only be answered partially; there may be lower response rates. To collect the richness of data required for this research, and in order to be able to probe and ask additional questions, interviews are argued to be a more suitable data collection tool. Questionnaires have internal validity difficulties as cited by Bush (2002 p.66). These difficulties are

firstly, that respondents may not complete the questionnaires accurately and secondly, that those who fail to respond may have responded differently to those who did respond. Open-ended questions on a questionnaire would invite honest and personal comment from the respondents. However, such open-endedness provides a number of difficulties for data handling as cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 pp.255, 256):

- If one tries to convert opinions into numbers then it could be argued that rating scales should have been used;

- Word-based data is not validly susceptible to aggregation;

- Responses may differ so much that aggregation is not possible;

- It is difficult to make comparisons between respondents;

- Respondents may not be capable of articulating their thoughts onto paper.

Focus groups

The use of a focus group was also considered and rejected. The advantages would have been that the views of more people could have been sought. However, as Bryman (2001 p.346) argues group interaction occurs during a focus group often resulting in a joint

construction of meaning. This social interaction distinguishes the focus group session from the individual interview in which individual perceptions and understandings of the phenomena can be explored and the interviewer is more able to control the situation, for example asking probing questions. In a focus group the moderator has to relinquish a certain amount of control to the participants (Bryman 2001 p.346). Although it might have been possible to see differences between the views of individuals it would not be possible to secure to what extent the views had been affected by group interaction. Additionally, individuals may have been less willing to explore subjective understandings in a group situation. A further disadvantage of focus groups is that analysis is lengthy and can be problematic. It may not always be clear who is speaking at various times so that individual views cannot be extracted. Transcription may also be difficult because of members of the group speaking at the same time.

Semi-structured interviews

The data collection tool selected is interviews as this potentially allows for a richness of information with the interviewees sharing subjective perceptions. Supporting the use of interviews in

educational research to gain understanding of perceptions Scott and

Usher argue:

> Interviewing is an essential tool of the researcher in
>
> educational enquiry. This is because the preconceptions,
>
> perceptions and beliefs of social actors in educational
>
> settings form an inescapably important part of the
>
> backdrop of social interaction.
>
> (Scott and Usher 1999 p.109)

Semi-structured interviews have been selected, in contrast to

structured interviews. As argued earlier, the option of using

structured interviews would involve changing the orientation from

qualitative to quantitative. It would be very difficult if not impossible

to use highly structured interviews within a qualitative approach.

Semi-structured interviews will allow for an in-depth exploration of

head teachers' perceptions and understandings of the factors which

facilitate, or inhibit, their ability to take strategic actions. The

understanding of semi-structured interviews underpinning this

research is described by Bryman as follows:

It *(the term 'semi-structured interview')* typically refers

to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions

that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is

able to vary the sequence of the questions. The questions are

frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference

from that typically found in a structured interview schedule.

Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further

questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.

(Bryman 2001 p.110)

An interview guide was used (appendix A) with areas of questioning. In

order to gather data on the head teachers' perceptions and

understanding of what helps or hinders their ability to take strategic

actions the interviewer was able to vary the sequence of questions and

probe understanding through follow up questions to replies. The

following are examples of such probing following the initial response:

You have talked about making appointments, but what has

been the balance between appointing from outside and

developing people from within?

(interview number 8)

You have talked about the knowledge and experience that

you have brought with you and pulling on that. How are you

continuing to develop your knowledge?

(interview number 4)

What experience have you had of what might hinder that

visionary growth that you have needed as a leader?

(interview number 8)

The semi-structured interviews also allowed for questions and

prompts to be changed and adapted as each group of interviews were

analysed in order to inform the next interview and the eventual

analysis. In practice, only two changes were made to the interview

guide: additional prompts on reminding the head teachers that the

transcripts would be returned to them for checking and to add any

additional comments; adding a question as to whether the role of the

researcher had affected their responses.

The use of interviews is a feature of both phenomenology and

grounded theory approach and it has already been argued that the

approach in this research has features of both these approaches.

However, rather than interviewing twenty to thirty people in order to try and saturate the field (Creswell 1998 p.122) there were interviews with ten head teachers who fulfil the criteria ensuring they have experience of implementing strategic actions, that is, actions designed to meet the needs of pupils in three to five years time. Creswell argues that ten is a reasonable size sample with in-depth interviews of individuals who 'have experienced the phenomena' (Creswell 1998 p.122). In this case, the phenomenon is the taking of strategic actions. Interviews with a finite number of people are feasible for the individual researcher for this thesis and the amount of time that can be made available for the preparation, interviews, transcriptions and analysis and yet meet the research objective.

It is recognized that interviews are a 'shared, negotiated and dynamic social event' and that 'the notion of power is significant in the interview process' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000 p.122). Those interviewed were head teachers in the local education authority in which the researcher is employed as an adviser to support and challenge schools. The steps taken to reduce bias and the possible effect of the power relationship will be explored in the next section.

D. The data collection process: ethical considerations; validity and reliability

Ethical considerations

To ensure ethical considerations are addressed in the research the University of Hull ethics agreement procedures have been followed. Permission for the research to be conducted within the researcher's local education authority was sought and given. Written agreement by the head teachers interviewed was also given and they were informed of the purposes of the research and the use of the data, given assurances of confidentiality and their right to withdraw data during the interviews (appendix B). All the head teachers returned the transcriptions and signed that they could be used for the research (appendix D). Some of the head teachers made minor changes to the transcripts. For example, to correct the spelling of names or to make slight changes to the wording they wish to be used as the following example illustrates:

> The first thing that happened for about a term and a half was that she did *very little* (replaced 'nothing' in the original transcript) in the context of actions.
>
> (interview number 10)

One head teacher added some written clarification as he was not sure that the importance of staffing was clear in the interview transcription.

It is essential that the data collection process techniques used provide data that has rigour, coherence and consistency. Although the terms validity and reliability are most commonly associated with positivist research Bryman (2001 p.272) points out 'qualitative researchers have tended to employ the terms reliability and validity in very similar ways to quantitative researchers when seeking to develop criteria for assessing research'. Reliability is concerned with ensuring that another researcher, or the same researcher at a different time, could collect the same data. In qualitative research reliability is also concerned with such features as authenticity, detail and depth of response. Validity is concerned with ensuring that the research accurately describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison argue (2000 p.105) it is *how* validity and reliability are addressed in the two research paradigms that are different.

Reliability

Reliability in quantitative research is about 'consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000 p.117). For example, a quantitative researcher will be concerned that measures such as IQ tests are consistent with the scores of the same person being stable over time rather than fluctuating. Some authors, for example LeCompte and Preissle (1993 p.332), have argued that external reliability in qualitative research may be unworkable as it is impossible to 'freeze' a situation or to make it replicable. For example, in this study a head teacher may respond differently about how they have brought about changes over a three to five year period if they are currently under pressure for short term gains. However, in contrast to the view of LeCompte and Preissle, Kirk and Miller (1986 p. 72 in Silverman 2000 p.188) argue that 'qualitative researchers can no longer afford to beg the issue of reliability'.

One way of addressing reliability in interviews would have been to have used highly structured interviews as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 p.121) with the same format and sequence of words and questions. However, this would have been more appropriate

if quantitative data was being sought. In this research semi-structured interviews have been selected in order to obtain rich, thick data from which respondents' understandings and perceptions can be analysed with areas of questioning and follow up questions posed to further probe understandings, as the examples of follow up questions given previously illustrated. As a result of the initial analysis and the interviewer's increasing confidence in listening actively to the immediate response of the interviewee and thinking of further questions that could probe their understanding or experience further, more probing questions were asked. For example,

One thing that hasn't come through is money, and maybe it is not significant to you. How has money availability helped or hindered (your ability to take strategic actions)?

(interview number 8)

What helps you to have that vision? Where do you go, what do you do to help you keep moving forward?

(interview number 9)

It is acknowledged that reliability in terms of replication may be a weakness in such qualitative research. However, the procedures used are documented, as suggested by Kirk and Miller (1986 p.72), with the interview guide included in the appendices (appendix A) so that other researchers could use the same procedures. As referred to earlier, reliability in qualitative research is concerned with authenticity, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000 p.120). The data collection process in this research addressed these matters in the following ways:

- transcribing the interviews in full;

- having the interviews transcribed by a third party;

- listening to the tapes whilst re-checking the transcriptions to ensure accuracy as the transcriber was not familiar with all the educational acronyms used, for example NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship);

- returning the transcriptions to each head teacher interviewed for comment and checking;

- being clear about the purpose of the research and the use of the findings.

It is acknowledged that authenticity, honesty and the depth of the response may be adversely affected by the issue of power as the researcher is employed as an adviser in the same local education authority as the head teachers interviewed. Therefore, as pointed out by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 p.123) the interviewees may give answers that they think the researcher may wish to hear. It may not be possible to eliminate this potential hindrance to reliability but the following steps were taken to try to reduce the effect of power: all respondents were volunteers with the purpose of the research made clear and how the findings will be used (appendix B); assuring those interviewed that their responses are not to be judged in any way; the pilot interviews were analysed to check that leading questions or comments were not used; the questions were open ended; asking respondents if our professional relationship has affected their responses; selecting interviewees for whom the researcher has not been the link adviser for their school within the previous two years. All the interviewees expressed the view that their responses were not affected by the researcher's role as an adviser in the authority. The following are two typical responses to the question "Were your responses affected by my role as an adviser in this L.E.A.?"

(My response was) not affected what I said whatsoever.

I would say that to someone I didn't know.

No, not at all. I genuinely believe that I can tell you

exactly how I feel.

Validity

As well as trying to minimize the possible effects of power, bias by

the interviewer is also a positivist criticism of the data collected in

interviews in qualitative research in terms of reliability but also

validity. Cannell and Kahn (1968 referred to in Cohen, Manion and

Morrison 2000 p.120) report that studies in which interviews were

used had a persistent problem with validity. Indeed positivists argue

that biased collusion and manipulation creates 'novelesque' data that is

manufactured or invented. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 p.120)

argue that 'the most practical way of achieving greater validity is to

minimize the amount of bias'. Other ways to try to ensure validity in

interviews and to reduce what Silverman (2000 p.177) calls

'anecdotalism' have been suggested although problems have also been

associated with these techniques.

To ensure greater validity, and also reliability, steps were taken to reduce bias in the data collection process. Possible sources of bias have been identified from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 p.121) and Oppenheim (1992 pp. 96, 97) and the following list is an amalgam of these sources with the steps taken to reduce bias:

- Seeking answers that support pre-conceived notions and biased questions and prompting:

Using an interview guide with areas of questioning (appendix A); to bracket pre-conceived ideas by asking open ended questions; not responding to answers with comments such as 'how surprising'; encouraging respondents to share their ideas and experiences; listening to each tape as well as transcribing to check for any bias in the question or responses to questions; listening to the recordings for any verbal stresses or emphases by interviewer or respondent as it is recognized that 'transcriptions often erase the context along with some crucial non verbal data' (Miles & Huberman 1994 p.56). After listening to the first four interviews it was noted that the researcher sometimes used the phrase 'key factors' when asking what affected their ability to take strategic actions. Although it did not appear to affect the responses the researcher ensured that this phrase was not

used in further interviews. In one of the first batch of four interviews the head teacher appeared to be seeking the researchers' affirmation of his views because of prior knowledge of the context of the school. For example, by making such comments as:' you would know that as you're an inspector'; 'nobody trusts anybody nowadays do they?' The researcher did not respond to these questions and, as with all those interviewed, the head teacher reported that his responses had not been affected by the role of the researcher in the local education authority.

- Poor rapport between the interviewer and the respondent: Interviews with known, volunteer head teachers who are fully aware of the purposes and use of the data; conducting the interviews on their school premises at a time convenient to them; seeking agreement on recording and note taking; assuring the interviewees that their responses will not be judged; interviewing head teachers for whom the researcher is not currently the attached local authority link adviser. Empathy was also sought by using phrases such as 'I understand what you are saying' during the interview process. All the interviewees appeared relaxed in the interview and all the interviews took place in the interviewees' own offices. There were a few interruptions because of traffic noise or telephones but these did not appear to affect the

responses although the flow was occasionally interrupted. The small size of the recorder used was unobtrusive and the recording process did not appear to restrict the responses.

- Misperceptions of what the respondent is saying:

Checking and clarifying what is being said during the interview and taking notes. For example: 'are you saying that you think that is largely a central government initiative?'; 'are these people that you have appointed yourself or were they here already?'

- Misunderstanding by the respondent of what is being asked:

Providing those to be interviewed with purposes of the research initially; sending a letter a week before the interview with the areas of questioning (as suggested following the first pilot interview) (Appendix C); ensuring that the respondents can ask for questions to be reframed or can be returned to later in the interview; returning the transcripts to those interviewed for checking. One of the last interviewees commented that he might have other thoughts to add later. This opportunity was provided when the transcript was returned for checking and any additional comments could be made. In practice this one head teacher wrote clarifying how important staffing was as a factor. He was not sure this was clear in the interview transcript as he felt he had 'rambled'.

As has been previously acknowledged reliability in semi-structured interviews may be weak as replicability is problematic. Even with reducing bias in the ways described it is also acknowledged that complete objectivity is not possible as the researcher is part of the world being researched and known to the interviewees. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000 p.105) point out 100% validity is impossible for research but the data collected sought to uncover the perspectives of the head teachers and the data has rich, thick descriptions. The semi-structured interviews sought to gain as full access as possible to the understandings and perceptions of those interviewed. Such rich data is the strength of the data collection process. How validity and reliability were addressed in the data analysis process is addressed in section G.

E. Piloting the data collection instrument and analysis

Piloting the data collection instrument

The sample for the pilot

To ensure that the data collection process and that the data collected fulfilled the research objective the interviews were piloted with three head teachers who fulfilled the following criteria:

- Willing, time available (about one and a half hours);

- Understand the purpose of the research and need for piloting;

- Assurance of confidentiality;

- Have understanding of strategy and strategic actions in line with the literature e.g. have attended relevant in service training, familiar with relevant publications, worked with an L.E.A. adviser developing strategic planning in their school.

The pilots were originally planned to take place in a local education authority about sixty miles away. Pilots within the researcher's own local education authority would have diminished the number of possible volunteers for the actual research who met the required criteria. Finding sufficient time for the travelling as well as carrying out the pilot interviews was problematic. A head teacher who fulfilled the criteria, and was working in an adjacent local education authority agreed to a pilot interview and provide feedback on the interview process as well as data on which the analysis could be piloted. This head teacher remarked that he felt relaxed during the interview and able to share his perceptions because he knew the researcher. As the head teachers interviewed for the actual research would be known to the researcher it was decided to pilot the second interview on a known

head teacher. Thus the second and third pilot interviews were also carried out with known head teachers who met the criteria and are not head teachers in the L.E.A. in which the researcher is employed.

The first two head teachers had both led schools which were identified by Ofsted as having serious weaknesses and although they had also been head teachers of other schools who were not in this category it became apparent that Ofsted was a driving force in some of the examples they gave of what helped them to take strategic actions. The third head teacher was the head teacher of a school deemed by Ofsted to be successful and she made no reference to the effects of Ofsted on strategic actions that she took. This factor was considered when choosing the final sample for the research.

Piloting the interviews and recording process

Preparing for the interview

The head teacher in the first pilot interview commented that as well as the original letter and brief telephone conversation to explain the purpose of the interview a letter approximately a week before outlining the areas of questioning would have helped him to prepare and provide more perceptive responses. This additional letter was

piloted with the second and third head teachers who both commented that they found the letter helpful to focus their thinking before the interview and provide fuller responses.

The setting

All three pilot interviews took place in the head teachers' own settings, which they commented made them feel relaxed. However, the first interview took place in school time and there were some interruptions, for example a query from a member of staff and a school bell ringing which may have affected the flow of the interview. As a result, the actual interviews would ideally take place in head teachers' own schools after school hours.

Responding to replies in order to get the data required

All three head teachers fed back that they felt able to have free reign in their responses but that the researcher helpfully steered them back to the focus at times and prompted them without leading. For example, asking for any further examples or asking for clarification of what was meant by their response.

The questions

The interview guide used had a number of key areas of questioning. This was useful in order to guide the interviewee but without limiting their answers. The first few questions were planned as introductory. For example, how long they had been head teacher at their present school and how many pupils there were. As well as clarifying the purpose of the research and matters of clarification on reflection it was useful to assure them that their responses would not be judged in any way. This may have helped to build empathy. Although the head teachers selected for the final sample were from schools where the researcher is not the link adviser they may have felt that certain responses were expected. The interview then moved on to ask for an example of strategic actions that the head teacher had taken and then what helped or hindered these actions. In the first interview the factors identified through the interview often referred to the example of a strategic action they had given. In the second and third interviews the head teachers were asked to reflect on more examples of what had helped or hindered them to take strategic actions in a number of different circumstances and richer data was provided.

On reflection after the first interview, simpler, more every day language was used in the second and third interviews and the head teachers asked for less clarification of what was meant. However, none fed back that they had not understood the areas of questioning, although this may have been a matter of pride on their behalf. This simpler language was retained in the research interviews. After listening to the first interview more time was given for interviewees in the second and third pilots to reflect on their responses and have time to think. This also provided useful data.

In order to obtain as much rich data as possible after the initial questions, head teachers were to be asked about what helped or hindered them to take strategic actions in four areas of strategic leadership that had been initially identified from the literature: visioning strategic actions; time related strategic actions; strategic actions involving people processes; strategic actions involving learning. By the time of the third pilot interview additional reading and reflection had reduced the areas of strategic actions to three, as there was considerable overlap. The three areas were now: strategic actions involving visioning; strategic actions involving learning; strategic actions involving structures. The third interview provided

rich data on all these areas although it was necessary to clarity that staffing structures were meant and not building structures.

It was originally decided to take notes on the content of what was said so that key ideas could be logged to aid analysis as well as notes on reactions to questions and body language for further insight into the meanings of what the interviewees were saying. In the first two pilot interviews notes were taken on the content, but this prevented the taking of any useful notes on reactions or body language. The transcriptions provided the detail of what was said so in the third pilot the note taking was restricted to reactions and body language. This restricted note taking was certainly beneficial to the researcher's ability to prompt and encourage the giving of further examples and the interviewee commented that 'you made good eye contact which helped me to respond'. However, very limited notes were taken on reactions to questions and this continued to be an area for development in the research interviews in case it provided useful data. In practice, the researcher made some notes, for example: whether the head teacher appeared relaxed; whether they reflected before answering; when they referred to notes they had prepared; when valuable responses occurred. A valuable learning point which the

researcher made note of to inform the ongoing interviews was that interviewees often had additional thoughts about what hindered or helped their ability to act strategically towards the very end of the interview process. To capture this reflection time was provided at several points towards the end of the interview and the recording process continuing until the final farewells were made.

Piloting the analysis

A layout of the transcription was piloted and not amended throughout the piloting process as it was found to be clear with separate columns for the code, the researcher's questions and prompts, the interviewees' responses and a final column for notes when analysing. A third person was employed to carry out the transcribing. She fed back after the first two interviews that occasionally the researcher spoke over the interviewee which means a few responses were not able to be transcribed in full. This was remedied on the third interview.

The coding system was derived from the literature review with a main code and a sub code. The main code referred to the five areas that had originally been identified that helped or hindered head teachers to take strategic actions: staffing; resources; time; change;

knowledge. Sub codes under each of these areas identified specific helping or hindering factors, again derived from the literature, each with their own code. After piloting the analysis of the first interview it became apparent that there were more codes than necessary. The coding was simplified with + or – indicating whether a factor was helping or hindering for the analysis of the second pilot. This still provided a rich amount of data. After the first two pilot interviews the area of ethos came up as a possible additional main code and considered as additional to the coding system. However, after further reading and reflection two sub codes referring to aspects of ethos were added to the staffing main code. The revised coding system was found to be effective in coding the information from the third interview and no omissions were found. The codes also facilitated the clustering of data, the next stage of analysis. This coding system was used on the first four research interviews and then amended as necessary before the next batch of four interviews and again before the last two interviews. The development of the coding system is described and justified in section G.

F. The choice of sample

In order to establish a sample of head teachers willing to be interviewed and whose responses would fulfil the research objective, a letter was sent to all primary phase head teachers in the researcher's local education authority. They were asked to volunteer if they were willing and able to ascertain that they fulfilled the following criteria:

- Willing (know time required, willing to sign ethical agreement about nature of the research included with the letter, confidentiality, right to withdraw);

- Have a school improvement plan which includes planning for the next 3-5 years;

- Have been a head teacher in one school for at least five years;

- Are able/willing to provide examples of having taken strategic actions, that is, actions which have led to success over three to five years.

In order to select a sample of ten from the thirty that responded positively the following process was employed in the following order until ten remained:

- Select those for whom the researcher has not been the attached L.E.A. adviser for their school for at least two years. This may help them to provide responses that are not adversely affected by any relationship with their schools. It is appreciated however, that as an L.E.A. officer in the same authority it may not be possible to eliminate this factor. This selection left eleven possible interviewees.

- Ensure that the representation of schools that have been judged by Ofsted to have serious weaknesses or to be subject to special measures since the national inspection programme was instigated in 1994 is similar to the proportion judged to be in either of these categories across the whole L.E.A., approximately 13%. This criterion is being used for the sample as in the pilot interviews, where schools were judged by Ofsted to be in either of these categories, the head teachers identified Ofsted as the key driving factor in taking strategic actions. Nationally and locally only a proportion of schools have been judged to be in either of these categories. Of the eleven interviewees remaining one school had been subject to special measures (nine years previously) and two identified as having serious weaknesses. One of the schools that had had serious weaknesses was removed from the sample leaving

ten. This meant that 20% of the sample had been deemed by Ofsted to be a cause for concern, a higher proportion than found across the L.E.A. The possible effect of this on the data and findings was later checked.

- Choose ten schools from those remaining representing the balance of infant, junior and primary schools across the L.E.A.: 66% primary; 33% infant; 33% junior. As ten schools remained after using the first two criteria this criteria was not applied. Of the ten schools remaining 80% were primary, 10% infant and 10% junior.

After the selection of ten head teachers, letters of thanks were sent to those who volunteered but were not in the final sample. Letters of acceptance were sent to the ten selected head teachers followed up by a telephone call to agree a convenient time and date. The interviews were scheduled in two batches of four and a final batch of two with sufficient time for analysis and any changes to the areas of questioning and coding for analysis between the batches. Following the findings from the pilot interviews it was suggested that the interviews took place in the head teachers' own schools and after school hours. In practice, nine of the ten interviews took place in

school time as this suited the interviewees. A week before the interview date a letter was sent out with further detail of the scope of the interview to aid their preparation, as developed in the piloting process (Appendix C).

Of the ten head teachers selected for the sample, 7% had more than ten years in headship (not necessarily in just one school); 20% were in their third headship; 50% were in their second headship. The amount of experience of these head teachers may have affected the amount of previous experience they were able to draw upon. Head teacher knowledge was identified as an area for analysis but following the first four interviews this was subdivided to take account of the nature of experience being identified as a helping or hindering factor for head teachers to take strategic actions. 80% of the head teachers were in schools with between two hundred and eighty five and four hundred and ninety pupils. The two remaining schools had considerably fewer pupils: one with one hundred and seventeen and the other with one hundred and thirty nine. Limited finances were mentioned by both these head teachers but on analysis funding availability came through as a hindering factor in a significant proportion of the interviews as described in the findings.

G. Data recording and analysis including validity and reliability

The data recording process

A digital recorder was used which proved to provide a high quality of recording from which accurate transcripts could be made, except on a few occasions when both the researcher and interviewee spoke at the same time. The researcher tried to ensure this did not happen and the number of times decreased on later interviews. Notes taken during the interviews related not to the content of what was being said but to non-verbal signs. For example, whether or not they appeared relaxed, when they referred to notes, when they took time to reflect. The researcher became increasingly proficient at listening and thinking at two levels. That is, providing verbal and non verbal signals of active listening to the interviewees' responses and thinking of a further question to ask to probe deeper or to address an area not brought up by the interviewees. Examples of further questions being asked were provided in section D.

Later on the same day of each interview the recordings were listened to in full and any additional notes made as to reactions to questions or when questioning led to answers providing rich data. After listening to the first four interviews it became very clear that interviewees often

gave reflective responses towards the very end of the interview, even after the guide questions had been completed. This may have been because of the reflections the interviewees were making during the interview process. In order to ensure that all the data was collected the recorder was not switched off in the last two batches of interviews until the final farewells were made.

It is recognized that both the transcriptions and the notes are selective as pointed out by Miles and Huberman: 'the researcher is constantly making choices about what to register and what to leave out' (1994 p.56). However, the use of an external person to transcribe the interviews should prevent selectivity in the transcriptions. The researcher checked the transcriptions against the original recording. In a few cases alterations were made to acronyms or technical terms that were written inaccurately because the transcriber was not familiar with them. The opportunity for each interviewee to check the full transcription also aided the accuracy. As piloted, the transcriptions were laid out in four columns as recommended by Miles & Huberman (1994 p.67): code; transcription of researcher; transcription of interviewee; notes.

Data analysis

Data analysis was at a number of levels. The first level was coding the transcriptions in order to retrieve and organise the data. This was coding chunks of text or sentences in which the interviewees identified factors that helped or hindered them to take strategic actions. The coding was not at individual word level as it was the meaning of the words that was being sought and therefore the context was important. The importance of analysing the meaning of words is stressed by Miles and Huberman (1994 p.56).

The coding system

The codes used derive directly from the literature review and can be found later in this chapter. As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994 p.58) there is a main code and then a series of sub codes. The main codes refer to the six areas of factors that may help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions: staffing/personnel; resources; time; change; knowledge; external accountability. Each of these main codes then has a series of sub codes that relate to specific helping or hindering factors within each of the six areas, also originating from the literature review. To aid analysis the codes are semantically close to the terms they are representing and all the

codes fit onto one sheet of paper as recommended by Miles and Huberman to aid ease of reference (1994 p.65).

Codes were added to and amended after the first batch of four interviews and again after the second batch of four interviews. The final coding system used for interviews numbers nine and ten was used to recode numbers one to eight. This development of the coding system aids validity as the reader can see that the interviewer is open to what is said rather than being 'determined to force fit the data into pre-existing codes' (Miles and Huberman 1994 p.61).

Changes to the coding system

After initial analysis of the first four interviews an additional main code, external accountability, was added as several of the interviewees had mentioned that expectations of external agencies was a helping or hindering factor in their ability to take strategic actions. This main code had three sub codes: Ofsted; the DfES; the L.E.A. The original main code, knowledge, was broadened to knowledge and experience then a series of further sub codes developed, reflecting the factors identified by the first four interviewees. These additional sub codes were: head teachers' use of previous experience;

head teachers' ability to model; head teachers' knowledge of appropriate timing; head teacher networking; staff able to model practice because of experience. This revised coding system was used to recode numbers one to four and to initially code numbers five to eight.

After analysing interviews five to eight, and reflection after the inter-coding, it became clear that the staffing / personnel main code needed an additional level of sub codes. This was in order to identify the different groups of people who were identified as helping or hindering factors. This final coding was used to code interviews nine and ten and recode, where necessary, the first eight interviews.

The final coding system

Main code	Sub code	
(Each statement coded to be helping + or hindering -)		

Main code	**Sub code**	*additional:*
S/P staffing personnel	**Re** readiness	
	Po positive relationships	*S staffing*
	Av Availability	*G governors*
	Bu Building skills	*P parents*
	Ap appointments	
	Al aligning	
	St strategic conversations	
	Tr staff to take responsibility	
R resources	**Fu** funding	
	Kn knowledge of	
T time	**La** availability	
	Op operational needs	
C change	**Ab** ability to respond	
	Pr predictability	
	In initiatives	
KE knowledge experience	**HtPe** use of HT previous experience	
	HtTi HT knowledge of appropriate timing	
	HTBk HT building knowledge/reflecting through networking	
	St staff knowledge of school's strengths & weaknesses	
	Am key staff able to model practice because of their experience	
E external accountability	**Of** Ofsted	
	Df DFES	
	LEA local education authority	

Examples of the use of the coding system

The following extracts from the interview transcriptions illustrate

how the main code and sub codes were used. In the first example the

additional sub code to distinguish between the roles of staff,

governors and parents is also shown.

Example 1: (a helping factor identified but using two sub codes)

Main code	Piece of text highlighted when coding:
S/P + (staffing/personnel)	*She worked with the governing body;*
Sub code	*they not only heard her brief & actions*
Al(aligning)	*but then they set up a sub group where*
Sub code: G (governors)	*5 governors were part of a monitoring*
	& support team. They had to report back
	to every main governors' meeting. This
	gave the project a lot of support.

Example 2: (a hindering factor identified)

Main code	Piece of text highlighted when coding:
C – (change)	*Initiatives can sometimes be a hindrance,*
Sub code	*it's the numbers that come through. I am*
In (initiatives)	*all for school improvement, for new*
	initiatives that will benefit the children
	but staff can't take them on at the speed
	they come in.

Example 3: (three linked hindering factors)

	Piece of text highlighted when coding:
Main codes	*There's just never time. Time & money.*
T, R, S/P	*If you could close the school for 3*
(time, resources, staffing/	*months & focus on all the things that*
personnel)	*you would like your staff to go through*
Sub codes	*& give them lots of experiences, going to*
La (time availability, Fu	*other schools, finding things out,*
(funding)	*developing materials. But you can't so*
Bu (building skills)	*time is really the essence.*

Reliability in analysis

Reliability was addressed in the data collection analysis by using an inter-coder, as recommended by Silverman (2000 p.186), for strengthening the reliability of field data in qualitative research. A peer analysed samples of the data using the same coding system but without seeing the researcher's analysis. They were asked to check that they too would have coded the responses of those interviewed in the same way and that the analysis is a logical, reasonable and credible interpretation of the data.

Initially there was between 53% and 61% agreement on the coding with the inter-coder. Following reflection and discussions all differences were resolved in the following ways:

- By identifying the need for an additional level of sub – code for staffing so that the data could be broken down further to: staff, governors, parents. To reflect the additional groups of people the main code of staffing was changed to staffing/personnel;

- The inter-coder sometimes coded a word or phrase if one of the factors identified in the coding system was mentioned in the course of the interview. This was agreed not to be valid as the

interviewee had not identified this occurrence as a helping or hindering factor;

- The inter-coder did not identify alignment from two of the transcriptions (interview number 2 p. 16 and interview number 5 p.10). The latter example had been identified as the use of strategic conversations by the researcher. The inter-coder was not as familiar with the literature and it was agreed that alignment was being referred to by the interviewees as a factor;

- There was some difference in factors coded by the inter-coder but believed not to be relevant by the researcher because of the context of the answer, that is whether the meaning of what was said really meant it was a helping or hindering factor. This was resolved following discussion;

- There were some differences in coding factors identified, for example, whether it was the ability to make appointments or the availability of staff that was being identified in interview number 2 p.27. The meaning of the interviewee was reflected upon and agreement reached.

Further levels of data analysis

Following coding, with inter-coding to address reliability, the coded pieces of text were cut and pasted onto large sheets of paper, organised according to the coding system. Each piece of text had the page reference for the interview noted in order to keep track of the source and to be able to refer back to the broader context if necessary. Using the clustered data the researcher carried out the following analyses:

- Recording factors identified as helping or hindering factors for each interviewee to see common areas or differences and recording on a summary sheet to obtain a picture across all ten interviews;

- Identifying key words to describe helping/hindering factors for example, important; vital; key. Plotting these words against the factor they were related to and noting by which interviewees;

- Identifying links between factors made by the interviewees and looking for patterns.

Validity in analysis

Internal validity

In order to check that the findings made sense and that they were a true reflection of what was being said the researcher answered a number of questions. These questions were derived from the writings of Miles and Huberman (1994 p. 279) and Moustakas (1994 p.57) on internal validity.

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subject's descriptions in such as way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subject's actual experiences?

As already stated, the head teachers checked through and returned the interview transcriptions. There were only minor alterations and just one head teacher provided some further written clarification that was taken into account in the analysis process. Extracts from the interviews are used to illustrate the findings to ensure that the head teachers' actual experiences inform the findings.

2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?

A third party prepared the transcriptions of the interviews, any technical language was checked by the researcher and the

transcriptions then read through by the interviewees. Just one head teacher added further written clarification to the meaning in the transcription.

3. In the analysis of the transcription, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified those alternatives?

The use of an inter-coder ensured that the coding system was applied consistently and any variations were discussed and agreement reached. The changes to the coding system made during the analysis process illustrate that the researcher ensured that the analysis reflected what the interviewees were actually saying.

4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?

The use of extracts from the transcriptions to illustrate and justify the findings seeks to ensure that there is a very close relationship between the data and the findings. However, it is acknowledged that the account is a representation of the reality rather than a reproduction of the reality that Hammersley (1992 pp. 50,51) argues is validity in qualitative research.

External validity

How can the findings be applied?

Generalization is not claimed as the sample of ten is acknowledged to be small. However, all those interviewed met the same criteria, received the same information, and were all known to the researcher. The findings include 'thick descriptions' for readers to be able to 'assess the potential transferability, appropriateness for their own settings' (Miles and Huberman 1994 p.279). As well as extracts from the interviews information about the head teachers and their schools is provided. For example, the size of the schools, the number of years the head teachers have been in post and whether this is a first or subsequent headship (Appendix E).

In the analysis process and the writing up of the findings the subjective views of the head teachers are described and reported. The subjectivity of this data is recognised but it was their views and experiences that were being sought. The interviewees' responses were based on their experiences and none referenced their experiences or views to the literature. It was their views that were being sought and it was therefore not surprising that responses frequently were in the first person. For example:' I realised'; 'I

suppose it's the case that; my background and experience has helped'; 'I make a conscious effort to'. At the second level of analysis the congruency of the findings were compared to the prior theory identified in the literature review. As well as noting when the findings were in agreement with the literature, for example, that the alignment of staff and governors is a helping factor, differences to the literature are also identified and described. An example of this is the finding that the alignment of parents and pupils is also a helping factor to head teachers' being able to take strategic actions that was not apparent in the literature.

H. Timetable of research

June 2003	research proposal based on initial reading
From July 2003	reading and writing drafts of literature review
From January 2004	reading and writing drafts of methodology
September 2004 – February 2005	pilot interviews and trialling of data analysis
May 2005	four interviews and analysis
June – July 2005	four interviews and analysis
September 2005	two interviews and analysis

From October 2005   analysis and findings; revision of earlier

chapters in light of research process and

findings; concluding chapter and editing

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

In this chapter the subjective views of the head teachers interviewed about what helps or hinders them to take strategic actions are identified and explored. Extracts from the interviews illustrate the findings and are included to help readers transfer the findings to their own situations or make comparisons. The findings are compared to the literature and any unexpected results discussed. The implications of the findings are discussed and justified.

The structure of this chapter is:

A. Factors that help head teachers to take strategic actions

    Ai. The dominant helping factors

    Aii. Observations on the findings concerning helping factors

B. Factors that hinder head teachers from taking strategic actions

    Bi. The dominant hindering factors

    Bii. Observations on the findings concerning hindering factors

C. Implications of the findings

A. Factors that help head teachers to take strategic actions

Although the head teachers made reference to a wide range of helping factors, six factors emerged strongly as helping head teachers to take strategic actions. These factors related to *people* and *knowledge and experience* rather than resources, time issues, change or external accountability.

Ai. The dominant helping factors

The six dominant helping factors that emerged were:

1. Aligning members of the school community

2. Having strategic conversations

3. Head teacher networking to build knowledge and reflect

4. Staff's knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses

5. Staff taking on responsibilities

6. Staff able to model practice because of their knowledge and experience

1. Aligning members of the school community

A view of alignment as a process in which members of the school community become signed up to the values, beliefs and aims of the school emerged. To achieve this 'signing up' or ownership of the values,

beliefs and aims of the school one head teacher described how groups,

representing members of the school community at a training session,

identified a set of values that were important in children's lives and

then shared the common areas identified and that this process 'builds

the groundwork for everything' (interview number 5). This alignment

then helped the head teacher to take strategic actions as everyone

was working in the same direction. Head teachers described everyone

working in the same direction in a number of ways for example, 'singing

from the same hymn sheet' (interview number 9), or 'working towards

the same aim' (interview number 2). Head teachers spoke of the

importance of team work, an aspect of alignment, in order to move the

organization forward as the following example illustrates:

In our school we've got excellent staff teamwork. Everybody's

got to be committed. I think in order to achieve

something you've got to have everybody on board.

(interview number 6)

Another head teacher stressed the importance of getting everyone

aligned in order for the school to move forward, commenting, 'what

really helped was having everyone on board and you have to get that sorted first' (interview number 3).

Alignment was understood as building a team approach in the staff. However, what also emerged was the importance of aligning other members of the school community: governors, parents and the pupils themselves. One head teacher described the effectiveness of getting 'absolutely everyone on board' including parents and children (interview number 3). Getting the different groups within the school community to 'sign up' to the school vision or the aim of a particular development came through strongly with 'the importance for all concerned to see what the benefits are going to be' and to see 'the different parts that they would play' (interview number 2). In this head teacher's experience members of the school community including staff, governors, administrative staff and parents working towards the school aims and seeing the benefits were 'champing at the bit'. Others spoke enthusiastically about how the support of governors, whether through being constructively critical or setting up a sub group to take a project forward, is vital. One head teacher asserted that having the support of governors gave the head teacher and leadership team the confidence to carry through developments.

Several of the head teachers referred specifically to the importance of having an active, supportive chair of governors:

> I think the chair is absolutely crucial ... Some of (the chairs) them have been dynamic. They do make a difference because if they work closely with the senior management team, they can really make a positive input in a school.
>
> (interview number 6)

Several of those interviewed made a direct link between being able to align staff and the ability to make the right appointments. For example, one head teacher who illustrated the advantage of being able to appoint staff who the head teacher knew would be compatible with, and contribute to, the school's aims. This head teacher described such staff appointments as 'crucial' and ensured this by 'observing them in their classrooms (in their current school), watching how they spoke to children, by looking at the environment they were working in' (interview number 10). Although head teachers spoke of aligning present staff by developing and sharing the school's vision, the importance of appointing staff who can support and develop the vision was also cited.

Also important to being able to align members of the school community was the helping factor of relationships. For example, 'it's a big factor ... we are lucky that we have a staff who work extremely well together' (interview number 7). Positive relationships with parents and governors were also cited as helpful to aligning the school community. The following is typical:

Supportive governors and parents are important. Governors have been fantastic. The parents have been extremely supportive. If they can see that you're changing the school for the good (then) they've been very supportive'

(interview number 5)

From the literature the importance of aligning staff in order for an organization to move forward over three to five years was clear (Pietersen 2002 p.131; Senge 1990 p.234). Several of those interviewed made a direct link between being able to align staff and the ability to make the right appointments. This view is supported by Collins (2001 pp. 12, 13), who argues that getting the right people is key and then creating alignment is not a problem.

The literature had also suggested that getting the support of governors was important in looking to the future (Hastings 2004 p.13) but the helpfulness of aligning other members of the school community, for example, pupils and parents, was not found in the literature but emerged strongly in the interviews.

2. Having strategic conversations

The importance of having strategic conversations with staff was a common thread in the interviews. Such conversations were important because they 'continue to drive the agenda' (interview number 3), or to discuss 'what we still need to do to get to the aims' (interview number 5), alternatively described as 'how to implement the vision' (interview number 2) or even 'to change ideas' (interview number 4). Others described how strategic conversations helped to ascertain 'how things might work' (interview number 7). However, fundamentally strategic conversations were about where 'we wanted the school to be in five years time' (interview number 2).

As to who took part in strategic conversations, this varied from every member of staff (interview number 8) to governors and senior staff

(interview number 2). However, what was emphasised was creating an atmosphere where people felt free to contribute their ideas. The following is a typical example of this view:

> We have had lots and lots of discussions and we have
>
> very open staff meetings where people are free and have
>
> the freedom to say what they think
>
> (interview number 4)

Davies and Ellison (2003) and Collins (2001) argue that debate and dialogue around strategy were helpful so the emergence of strategic conversations as a helping factor by the head teachers raised no surprise. The head teachers expressed differing views of who should be involved in strategic conversations. Some were of the view, supported by Collins (2001 p.115), that it should be a few key people and others that wider participation was valuable, as advocated by Davies and Ellison (2003 p.50).

3. Head teacher networking to build knowledge and reflect

The use of head teacher networking to build knowledge and have a chance to reflect came through very strongly as a helping factor.

Networking was described at both a local, regional, and international level. At local level this was with groups of fellow heads discussing policies, resources, providing inspiration and helping to keep the job in perspective. Time spent networking also provided an opportunity to reflect as typically described:

> You spend a couple of days out with colleagues and then
>
> things have occurred to you that you need to address ... or
>
> you come back with a view that there is a better way
>
> of doing things.
>
> (interview number 9)

Several head teachers described how working with groups of head teachers on a wider geographical basis also helped them. A typical example was,

> I also do things regionally in order that I can bring back
>
> ideas and experiences. I think it's important for two reasons,
>
> one it keeps me fresh, but two, it allows me to rehearse my

vision. Rehearsing it is always good because you

sometimes see the flaws. (It's) where I go for my growth.

<div align="right">(interview number4)</div>

A few head teachers also described the advantage of international

networking. For example to reinforce what you are already doing or to

find new directions (interview number 8) or to build the head

teacher's vision and how 'I could do that (build the vision) within the

constraints of what life in school is actually like' (interview number 6).

In contrast, one head teacher, whilst identifying networking as a

helping factor, also pointed out that it can, however, be demoralising:

> When we network with some heads we come back very
>
> demoralised because you've heard them celebrate
>
> something which you may not have done ... it can be daunting
>
> because we all have different strengths.
>
> <div align="right">(interview number 10)</div>

The literature (Fullan 2004 p.4 and 2005 p.18) had suggested that

networking would be viewed as important by head teachers to build

their knowledge and have an opportunity for reflection. However,

although Fullan (2004 p.5) notes disadvantages of networking, the finding that it can also be demoralising is not supported in the literature.

4. Staff's knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses

The staff's knowledge of strengths and weaknesses was described as a helping factor by eight of the head teachers. The reasons that head teachers cited this included that the staff sometimes 'come up with problems that weren't perceived and you have to take note of these problems (to take the school forward)' (interview number 2). The ongoing process of the staff getting the big picture so that 'we know what is working and what needs tweaking or to be abandoned' was described as important in order to work towards the aim. However, the need to start with a clear analysis and understanding by the staff of 'where the pupils are' in terms of their learning or why teaching is better than learning was stressed as this helped staff to have ownership of the issue. The importance of there being clear evidence for the staff to appreciate the issue is illustrated by this typical example:

There was clear evidence that we weren't achieving the

number of level 5's in maths – you could see that from the

data. There was clear evidence that children, for

whatever reason, were not making (expected) progress;

progress was patchy across the school.

(interview number 4)

As well as understanding the strengths and weaknesses head teachers

expressed the view that it was important that the staff could also see

the advantages in tackling the weaknesses, not just for the progress

of the pupils for example, but also from a personal point of view. As

one head teacher said, the staff have to identify the 'what's in it for

me factor' (interview number 9).

The usefulness of involving the staff in building a picture of the

school's strengths through school self-evaluation is supported by the

literature (Fullan 2001, Leithwood and Louis 1998, Sergiovanni 2001).

However, in contrast to the literature the head teachers did not

describe explicitly that such involvement of the staff in

understanding the strengths and weaknesses in the school was part of

creating a learning organization.

5. Staff taking on responsibilities

Having staff to take on responsibilities was identified clearly by nine of the head teachers as a helping factor in taking strategic actions. Particular words and phrases emphasised the importance to the head teachers of having staff who take on responsibilities. For example, 'particularly effective', 'vital', 'the key thing is to have the key people'.

Several of the head teachers referred to building the leadership team of the school as being key, for example: 'putting a good deputy in place has been vital' (interview number 5). Having a leadership team that can help take the school forward was described typically as follows:

> One of the key elements for a head is to have a good
> leadership team ... having a leadership team who are
> able to subscribe to that (the vision) and support it is one
> of the differences I have seen in successful schools.
>
> (interview number 8)

However, it was not just having senior members of staff to take on responsibilities that was deemed to be helpful. The momentum that

middle managers can provide when given responsibility was expressed by one head teacher:

> At the moment we've got a major piece of work
>
> going on in assessment for learning and that's being
>
> driven by middle managers
>
> (interview number 8)

In the interviews it was evident that having staff to take on responsibilities was clearly linked to being able to make appointments, either by promoting from within the school or externally. The following is typical of such a view:

> There's another level which is distributive leadership,
>
> that is, ownership that should take us one step forward again ...
>
> Someone in the school has the responsibility and
>
> plans when it is going to be put into place ... One of these
>
> people has come up through the school, the other came from a
>
> different authority. We need these people and if they are
>
> not in school then we need to bring in people.
>
> (interview number 10)

Very often when head teachers described the importance of having staff to take responsibilities they linked this with these staff also being able to model practice. This was the sixth dominant helping factor to emerge. However, the modelling of practice by staff as a helping factor was not just limited to members of the leadership team.

Some of the head teachers also made a link between staff taking on responsibilities and relationships and the positive effect of these two factors on moving the school forward. For example, the power of purposeful yet informal relationships (interview number 9) and 'elevating rather than depressing people (thus) enabling them to contribute toward success and create a culture of success' (interview number 8). One head teacher described (interview number 4) how people with responsibilities were 'strategic champions' who also shared their enthusiasm. The positive effect of staff with responsibilities sharing their enthusiasm for the project they were leading was echoed by others interviewed.

The helpfulness of having staff to take on responsibilities in order to help a school or organization move forward towards its aims supports

the findings from the literature (NCSL 2004a p.15, NCSL 2004c p.3, Collins 2001 p.125). The usefulness of distributing responsibilities to many different people, not just the leadership team, for example also middle managers, is found in the literature (NCSL 2004a p.15). However, no one expressed the view that distributing the leadership was helpful as it freed the head teacher to think and plan over a longer term as suggested by the literature (NCSL 2004a p.7).

6. Staff able to model practice because of their knowledge and experience

Two advantages of having staff who were able to model or act as role models because of their knowledge and experience emerged relating to the head teacher being able to take strategic actions and therefore, move the school towards its mid term aims or vision. Firstly, to develop the practice of others and secondly, modelling the development process towards the vision.

Head teachers described how staff were role models and thus developed the practice of others, thereby helping the school to move towards its aims. For example:

Literacy is another example. K. initially took this on

and gave it a go, shared it with a few others, they were

impressed so now it has spread … if somebody can trial

something and make it work … then it gives people the

idea that this is what we are looking for.

(interview number 3)

The ability of staff to model practice was described by one head

teacher as being 'really helpful' and another described a teacher as a

role model who 'is a leading light who will help to move things forward,

for example by sharing planning' (interview number7). Emphasising the

helping factor of staff modelling practice that helped head teachers

to take strategic actions, a head teacher described staff that are

able to model the school's vision as 'strategic champions' (interview

number 4).

Some head teachers described a member of staff not just modelling

practice but also modelling the development process. For example:

involving staff, governors, parents and pupils in an audit; carrying out

research by reading or visiting other schools; agreeing outcomes and

drawing up an action plan; continually asking for and using feedback

(interview number 10). From the modelling of this process both the member of staff modelling and other members of staff become learners and thus all drew on and developed their knowledge and experience.

From the analysis of the interview data it became apparent that two other factors, being able to make the right appointments and having positive relationships, impacted on staff being able to model practice. Some head teachers described being able to appoint key members of staff from outside the school, and others appointing people from within the school to new posts, who were able to model practice. The following comment illustrates this:

> We have a new literacy co-ordinator, from another school,
>
> who has been a breath of fresh air … and our ICT co-ordinator,
>
> who we appointed, she has been sharing her expertise
>
> in using interactive whiteboards … sharing teaching
>
> (interview number 5)

From the data it also emerged that as well as modelling practice key members of staff also have a positive effect, which supports head

teachers in taking strategic actions, by modelling their enthusiasm and thus helping to build positive relationships. These positive relationships also supported the modelling of the practice of 'taking risks within a blame free culture' (interview number 4).

The finding that having staff being able to model practice, and therefore develop the practice of others, is supported in the literature (NCSL 2004b p.6). The literature also supports the finding that creating an organization where members view themselves as learners and learn from others is beneficial to the development of the organization, for example, Senge (1990 pp. 3, 4).

Aii. Observations on the findings concerning helping factors

The dominant helping factors are not all distinct

Although six factors emerged as the dominant helping factors two of them affected each other: staff taking on responsibility and staff able to model practice because of their knowledge and experience. In many cases this was because head teachers described those given leadership roles as also being role models for staff. This view is supported in the literature as the positive influence on teachers of following leaders who 'walk the talk' (NCSL 2004b p.6).

Some dominant helping factors are influenced by other helping factors

Although the ability to make appointments did not emerge as a dominant helping factor overall it did emerge as a factor which impacted on three of the dominant factors: aligning the school community; having staff to take responsibilities; staff able to model practice. From the literature, for example Collins (2001 p.13), it is clear that having the right people is important but to the head teachers it was the impact that this had on other key helping factors that they judged to be more influential. Consequently, appointments have been referred to when illustrating these dominant factors.

Relationships were the other factor which, although not emerging as dominant, did have an impact on the ability to align the school community. As has been described when illustrating the dominant factor of aligning, having positive relationships was viewed as key to that process and thus moving the school forward. It has also been described how staff taking on responsibilities and staff modelling practice are impacted upon by positive relationships.

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Observations on other possible helping factors relating to staffing and personnel factors

Although factors relating to staffing and personnel emerged as dominant helping factors or factors affecting dominant factors, three of the possible factors in this area did not emerge to any extent, if at all, as helping head teachers to take strategic actions. These were: availability of staff; the ability to build skills; staff being ready and motivated. The availability of staff, as predicted from the literature (Jensen 2003), was only viewed as a hindering factor. The value of building staff skills was mentioned by a few of those interviewed as a helping factor but it emerged more strongly as a factor which was hindered because of lack of resources. There were some passing references to the helping factor of staff being ready and motivated but within the experiences of the head teachers aligning the school community, which is, getting everyone working in the same direction. On reflection this may have been because a) it was the head teachers being interviewed and they did not view the readiness or motivation of the staff as separate to this alignment process or b) the head teachers did not discern a significant difference between positive relationships and staff being ready and motivated.

Observations on other possible helping factors relating to knowledge and experience

Members of staff being able to model practice because of their knowledge and experience emerged as a dominant helping factor. However, the use of the head teacher's knowledge and experience and their knowledge of appropriate timing for action did not emerge strongly. On reflection this may have been because it was the head teachers themselves who were being interviewed and they did not feel it appropriate to identify the positive effects of their own knowledge although they were given opportunities to do so. However, the head teachers building their knowledge and reflecting through networking did emerge strongly as a helping factor for them to take strategic actions.

Observations on other possible helping factors relating to resources

In relation to *resources* none of the head teachers expressed a view that knowledge of funding helped them to take strategic actions. This was in contrast to earlier findings (Jensen 2003) and may be because schools are now provided with multi-year budgets (Education Act 2005 Section 101, Schedule 16) or that there are fewer different funding streams coming into schools, for example the consolidation of

standards fund grants from the DfES. A few made a passing reference to how the availability of funding had helped them to take strategic actions but this factor emerged more strongly as a hindering factor.

Observations on other possible helping factors relating to time and change

Factors related to *time* and *change* were not viewed as helping factors at all and only emerged as hindering factors. This was anticipated from the literature, for example, Leithwood (2001) in relation to lack of time and Jensen (2003) and Fullan (2005) in relation to the overload of initiatives.

Observations on other possible helping factors relating to external accountability

External accountability through the Ofsted inspection process was mentioned in passing by a few of the head teachers as a positive factor in helping them to take strategic actions although there was not overall agreement on this across the sample. The literature suggested (Ofsted 2004 p.174) that the inspection process might have been helpful for head teachers to take strategic actions when

there is an urgency or imperativeness about the actions. For example, when schools are found to have serious weaknesses or are in need of special measures. However, in the two schools that had been subject to one of these Ofsted categories the inspection process was not described as a helping factor. In fact it was typically the inspection process validating the school's own self-evaluation that was cited as a helping factor. These two examples illustrate this point:

> I think self-evaluation was a good move and that is
>
> exactly the direction we should be going in ... and then
>
> Ofsted validate it
>
> > (interview number 8)

> Ofsted: they put the rubber seal on what we
>
> already knew, so they made it a key issue and that
>
> was fine
>
> > (interview number 5)

External accountably, to central or local government, did not emerge as a helping factor at all and will be considered in the following section

on factors found to be hindering to head teachers in their ability to take strategic actions.

B. Factors that hinder head teachers from taking strategic actions

Factors relating to *people,* that is staffing and personnel, also dominated as hindering factors to head teachers being able to take strategic actions as they had as helping factors. However issues of *time, resources, initiatives* and *external accountability* also emerged. As with the helping factors there were links between factors and some minor factors impacted on the dominant factors. Coincidentally six dominant hindering factors emerged. There was no intention to match the number of hindering and helping dominant factors.

Bi. The dominant hindering factors

The six dominant hindering factors that emerged were:

1. Difficulties with aligning members of the school community

2. Unavailability of staff

3. Lack of funding

4. Lack of time because of operational needs

5. The number of initiatives

6. External accountability/expectations of central government

1. Difficulties with aligning members of the school community

The problem of aligning staff so that the head teacher could take

strategic actions was identified by many of those interviewed. The

detrimental effect on moving the school forward because members of

the school community have not been aligned is illustrated by these

comments by one of the head teachers:

    Initiatives have fizzled when we thought they were

    were embedded ... initiatives are doomed to failure

    if people aren't signed up

               (interview number 9)

Often it was individual members of staff who caused a difficulty with

moving the school forward. This was sometimes also described as a

problem with relationships. Typical of the examples given was:

    I can think of a member of staff who has been very negative

    about something and that can put a break on a whole school

issue because one of the things you want to do really is

consistency across the school in the way that you're driving

forward.

<div align="center">(interview number 2)</div>

Another head teacher spoke of 'floundering upon the rock of individual

staff members' who had a negative effect because they were not

aligned.

In a further example relating to difficulties with aligning staff, the

link between making appointments and difficulties with aligning is

illustrated:

If you get the recruitment wrong … that is a key

area. The effect on how the school is operating and how it

diverts energy is detrimental.

<div align="center">(interview number 8)</div>

When head teachers spoke of the hindering effect of not having staff

that were aligned it was clear that this applied to non teaching as well

as teaching staff as this example illustrates:

You can leave certain people behind and that is detrimental.

You can leave some people feeling out of it and not part of the

team whether that's your administrative staff, teaching

assistants or lunch time staff. They all need to be

part of the team and teaching assistants are becoming a

bigger and more important part of the team. They all need

to feel valued. You need consistency with everyone going

forward together.

<p align="center">(interview number 2)</p>

However, as well as the hindering effect of staff not being aligned

the hindering effect of other groups or individual members of other

groups not being aligned also emerged. In relation to governors it was

primarily individual governors, particularly the chair of governors,

rather than the whole governing body. One head teacher identified a

previous chair of governors as one of her biggest hindrances to acting

strategically and another head teacher identified governors being

aligned as crucial because 'they can also cause a lot of the problem ...

they can be detrimental' (interview number 6).

A few of those interviewed also referred to how not having parents aligned could be detrimental in being able to move the school forward and again illustrates about how negative relationships can be a hindrance to alignment.

> Parents reacted very strongly against something and it was having a knock on effect between relations between home and school ... this one issue is worth postponing rather than it affecting other issues which are also important to the school.
>
> (interview number 2)

Other head teachers spoke of needing to convince parents of the benefits of moving the school forward. One head teacher commented that the educational experiences of the parents themselves affected their views. For example, whether they supported an initiative to move to a visual, inclusive curriculum which the staff felt met the needs of the pupils when the parents had experienced traditional educational methods. As alignment had emerged strongly as a helping factor to head teachers being able to take strategic actions it was not surprising that not being able to align the school community would be a

hindrance. However, the literature (Pietersen 2002, Senge 1990, Hastings 2004), whilst supporting that alignment is a helping factor to organizations moving forward, is not explicit about the hindering factor of not being able to align.

2. Unavailability of staff

The unavailability of staff was identified by over half of those interviewed as a hindering factor to head teachers taking strategic actions. Unavailability of staff had a detrimental effect on continuity for the children and therefore their progress in school as well as the pace of being able to move the school forward. A typical comment on the detrimental effect of staff unavailability was:

> When they have been away they've got some catching
>
> up to do and if they're part time on return it takes
>
> them longer to catch up. D. burnt themselves out,
>
> Then there was a maternity leave so progress for the
>
> school was stop, start, stop, start and it prevents
>
> things from going forward as they are not part of it.
>
> (interview number 9)

Most commonly the unavailability was because of breaks in service because of maternity leave or long-term sickness.

> Sickness is a significant factor, a real problem. When someone is off initially you don't know how long they are going to be off. The children are affected because they do not have continuity and you can see the effect (on them) through the whole time they are in the school.
>
> (interview number 6)

Staff unavailability in a small number of examples was due to mobility or bureaucracy involved in the appointment and clearance process. Staffing unavailability was a hindering factor predominantly when the staff member absent was a senior member of staff or one with key responsibilities as the following example illustrates:

> You get things that interrupt the direction that you're going in. We've had 25 maternity leaves since the school opened and one of the problems is that quite often it has been a member of the senior team or a co-ordinator.
>
> (interview number 2)

The unavailability of staff was identified by over half of those interviewed as a hindering factor to head teachers taking strategic actions and had been identified in an earlier small scale piece of research (Jensen 2003).

3. Lack of funding

Lack of sufficient funding was identified as a key hindering factor to head teachers being able to take strategic actions and was described variously as: 'there are constraints because of money'; 'finances have stopped us';' money has been a real problem'.

The lack of money to build the skills of staff was identified specifically as a hindering factor to head teachers taking strategic actions as the following examples illustrate:

> Money presents a problem. For example, the Leading
> from the Middle course costs £1,000 for the
> 3 teachers … I sometimes think that if we go on a conference
> or training we are taking something away from the school.
>
> (interview number 5)

If you aspire to train people and develop them as a responsible

manager you have to do that from your supply budget and that

limits other activities.

(interview number 4)

Insufficient funding also prevented head teachers from completing a

development or initiative. For example,

The amount of money committed to some curriculum areas

hasn't been enough to actually see things through. We

haven't been able to move forward and make an impact in

the way I would have liked.

(interview number 9)

In the two smaller schools in the sample, with under one hundred and

forty pupils, funding also had a detrimental affect on the ability to

give staff responsibilities and promotion opportunities and

contributed to staff availability.

Money is an issue because we have lost people in the past

through not being able to offer a career structure with

enough management points.

(interview number 9)

However, the negative influence of lack of funding on staff availability

was not an overall finding across the sample.

The hindering factor of the lack of funding on head teachers' ability

to take strategic actions echoes the literature (Jensen 2003, Walsh

2005). However, it was not the lack of knowledge about funding that

was cited as a hindering factor as had been the case in the

researcher's earlier research (Jensen 2003 p.16). On reflection this

may be because schools are now provided with three year budgets and

the majority of standards funding from central government is now

passed directly to schools.

4. Lack of time because of operational needs

This emerged strongly as a hindering factor and in many cases was

linked to funding. The lack of time because of day-to-day pressures,

sometimes connected to building projects, was variously described as

'a huge problem', 'my worst nightmare' and 'really significant'. Head
teachers made a direct link between lack of time and inability to build
staff skills, many expressing the view that if more money was
available then time could be bought and that both time and money
were necessary to build the skills of staff. The following is a typical
example of this view:

I mean there is never enough time. Time is massively difficult.

The other inhibitor is money. If you have money you can buy

supply time (and) can create situations where teachers can be

reflective. There is a very focused development within the

school about being learner... But the inhibitor to that is

time.

(interview number 4)

Lack of time to take strategic actions because of the operational
needs of the school was identified by a number of the head teachers
as a hindering factor. This was in all sizes of school from the largest
with nearly 500 pupils to the smallest with just under 130. The nature
of the operational needs which affected the time for the head
teacher to take strategic actions varied from building developments,

health and safety issues or teaching commitments. The operational

needs of the school prevent head teachers from reflecting on what

was actually happening in school or to share and reflect with other key

members of the school community. As one head teacher said:

> You know sometimes the daily management of the school
>
> just takes over and you don't have the time to stop, take
>
> stock and look at what is actually going on out there. It
>
> stops you from doing that as an individual but also to share and talk
>
> with the people who you trust and you know are on board
>
> (interview number 3)

The finding that operational school needs affect head teachers'

ability to take a broader view is supported by the literature

(Leithwood 2001, Southworth 1998). This finding was across the

sample, regardless of school size although, as noted, the two smaller

schools also reported that insufficient funding affected the

availability of staff.

5. The number of initiatives

The number of initiatives was cited strongly as a hindering factor to the head teachers being able to take actions to move the school forward to meet the medium term objectives or aims. Head teachers spoke of 'too many initiatives' and 'the hindrance of the number of initiatives that come through'. The excessive number of initiatives had a number of negative effects. For example, improvements failing:

> 'you try to do too many things ... all those important
>
> improvements can fail because you are trying to do too much.'
>
> > (interview number 7)

As a result of trying to do too much, initiatives 'do not become embedded' or improvements 'are slowed down' (interview number 9). A further detrimental effect of an overload of initiatives cited was the inability to implement, even when the developments are believed to be important:

> they can't take them (the initiatives) on and implement
>
> them at the speed they come in ... they just can't
>
> > (interview number 2)

all those important improvements fail because you

are trying to do too much

                    (interview number 10)

As a result of too many initiatives several of the head teachers spoke

of how staff became demotivated:

We have had too many initiatives ... these things can be

demotivating generally and then that impacts on

the initiatives.

                    (interview number 7)

Several of the head teachers stated that initiative overload also

affected creative thinking and learning by themselves and their staff,

preventing them from moving the school forward. Consistently it was

initiatives driven from central government that the head teachers

spoke of, some of which were statutory, for example the 'over

burdening national curriculum' (interview number 10). The effect of

central government emerged as a dominant hindering factor.

The detrimental effect of the number of initiatives in schools is found

in the literature, for example, Fullan (2005 p.20). However, in

contrast to earlier research (Jensen 2003) the unpredictability of changes or initiatives did not emerge as a hindering factor. This may be because head teachers have come to expect constant change or, as Davies and Ellison (1999 p. 50) argue, much of the school environment is predictable.

6. External accountability/expectations of central government

The expectations of central government were viewed as hindering to the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions for a number of different reasons. Firstly, the inconsistency of central government as shown in the comment that, 'what you might think is in now might be quite different in three years time because of new ministers coming in' (interview number 2). Secondly, statutory initiatives such as the national curriculum or testing were viewed as hindering by head teachers. The over burdening national curriculum prevented teachers engaging in creative thinking and 'head teachers empathised with their teachers and agreed that they couldn't do anything else' (interview number 10). The national testing and publication of results was identified as hindering as the following head teacher describes:

SATs (Standard Assessment Tasks) do hinder you

because you know that at the end of the day you are

judged on the results that are published. It certainly

does make a difference because whatever you think

might be important, SATs become the most important.

They (SATs) have been a hindrance in lots of ways.

(interview number 6)

The third area of central government expectation that was found to

be hindering was bureaucracy. For example, the requirement to have

all staff re-checked before taking up a post or the lengthy process of

applying for funding.

The expectations of central government and accountability to them,

for example, through national testing, had been anticipated from the

literature (Earl, Watson, Levin, Leithwood, Fullan and Torrance 2003

p.137). Fullan (2005 p.20) had also pointed out the demotivating

effect of too much intrusion through vertical authority. However, in

contrast to the literature the hindering factors of external

accountability through inspection or to the local education authority

did not emerge as dominant hindering factors. The possible reasons

for this will be explored in the next section.

Bii. Observations on the findings concerning hindering factors

The dominant hindering factors are not all distinct

Clear links emerged between the lack of *time* because of the

operational needs of the school and a lack of *funding* as head teachers

described how additional funding would have allowed them to buy time.

There were also links between the need to implement initiatives and

the *external accountability* demands of central government. This is

not surprising as many of the initiatives in schools do indeed originate

from central government although they are not all statutory.

Some dominant hindering factors are influenced by other hindering

factors

Lack of time because of operational needs of the school and a lack of

funding also caused difficulties with building staff skills in order to

help the school move forward. Although this link was not anticipated

from the literature directly it is not surprising that it was found to be

difficult to train staff, for example by sending them on courses, if

there are adequate amounts of either time and/or money. Difficulties

with aligning the school community emerged strongly as a hindering factor, alignment was affected by both relationships and the ability to make appointments. This finding matched the factors that affected aligning the school community as a helping factor to head teachers being able to take strategic actions. Difficulties with aligning the school community were found to be adversely affected if relationships are negative or if it is difficult to appoint staff that supported the school's vision. Although the literature is largely written on the positive impact of alignment Collins (2001 p.13) makes it clear that getting 'the wrong people off the bus' is key to moving an organization from good to great.

Observations on other possible hindering factors relating to staffing and personnel

It is clear that *staffing and personnel* factors, that is those relating to *people,* are paramount, although not exclusive, as hindering factors in a head teacher's ability to take strategic actions. Two of the dominant factors and three of the factors impacting on the dominant factors related to staffing and personnel. Two other possible areas of staffing and personnel firstly, the value of strategic conversations and secondly, having staff to take responsibility, were only expressed

as helping factors. However, it may be reasonable to deduce that as they were identified as helping factors they could also be viewed as hindering if they were not in place.

Observations on other possible hindering factors relating to knowledge and experience

Knowledge and experience, either of staff or the head teachers themselves, were not identified as hindering factors at all. This is perhaps not surprising as head teachers are unlikely to reveal that they do not have the requisite knowledge and experience and maybe would not wish to reveal this about their staff either.

Observations on other possible hindering factors relating to resources

Although lack of funding emerged as a dominant hindering factor, the lack of knowledge about funding cited as a hindering factor in the researcher's earlier research, did not emerge (Jensen 2003 p.16). On reflection this may be because schools are now provided with three year budgets and the majority of standards funding from central government is now passed directly to schools.

Observations on other possible hindering factors relating to time and change

The operational needs of the school and the number of initiatives a school is expected to implement emerged as dominant hindering factors. However, in contrast to earlier research (Jensen 2003) the unpredictability of changes or initiatives did not emerge as a hindering factor. This may be because head teachers have come to expect constant change or, as Davies and Ellison (1999 p. 50) argue, much of the school environment is predictable.

Observations on other possible hindering factors relating to external accountability

External accountability, either through the inspection process or to local government, did not emerge as hindering factors. This was in contrast to the literature. The research carried out by Ofsted (Ofsted 2004 pp. 44-46) had suggested that the inspection process could cause stress and anxiety that could adversely affect the ability of the head teacher to take strategic actions. None of those interviewed viewed Ofsted inspections as a hindering factor to them taking strategic actions. In fact, as described earlier, it was only viewed positively. This may be because the inspection process has

changed to focusing on validating the school's own self-evaluation and head teachers view this positively. External accountability, to local government through the local authority, was cited by just one head teacher as hindering in line with the literature (Jensen 2003, Fullan 2005). It is acknowledged that the researcher's position as a local authority employee may have affected this not emerging more strongly as a hindering factor although the head teachers reported that this had not affected their responses.

Having considered the dominant factors which emerged as helping or hindering to head teachers being able to take strategic actions the implications of the findings are now explored.

C. Implications of the findings

To illustrate the discussion of the findings diagrams 1 and 2, on the following pages, represent the main findings of this research. The diagrams show: the six dominant helping factors and six dominant hindering factors that emerged; which dominant factors impacted on each other; the minor factors which impacted on the dominant factors. An adaptation of Pietersen's model (Pietersen 2002 p.37) has been added to each diagram to illustrate that strategic actions,

helped by the factors identified, lead to the medium term success of schools. If strategic actions are hindered the school may not achieve medium term success. The diagrams are a working representation of the findings and it is acknowledged that they are imperfect.

Able to make appointments

1 Aligning members of the school community

2 Having strategic conversations

Relationships

Leaping to the Second Curve

3 Head teacher networking to build knowledge & reflect

6 Staff able to model because of their knowledge & experience

Success

Time

4 Staff's knowledge of school's strengths & weaknesses

5 Staff taking on responsibilities
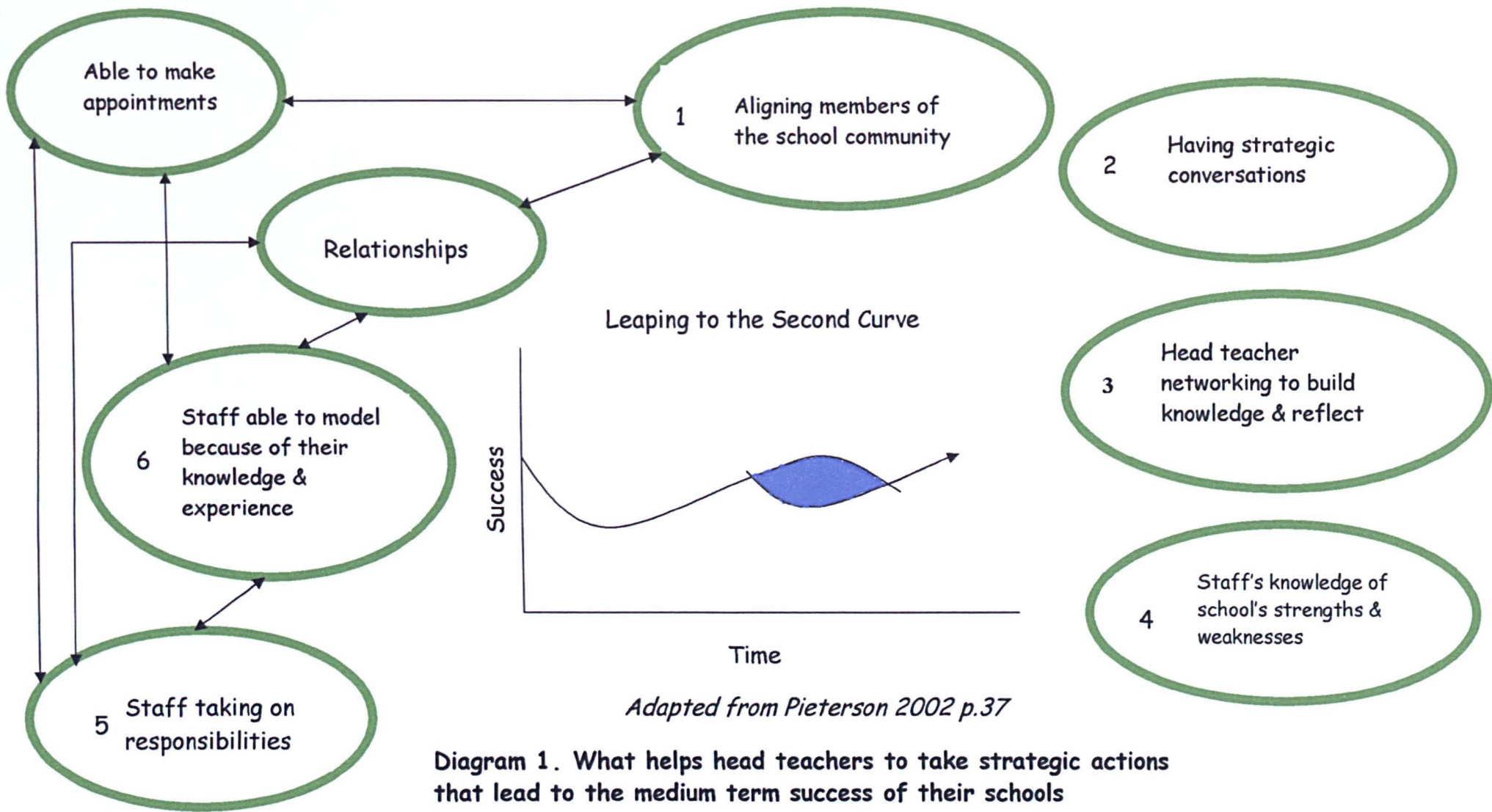
Adapted from Pieterson 2002 p.37

Diagram 1. What helps head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools
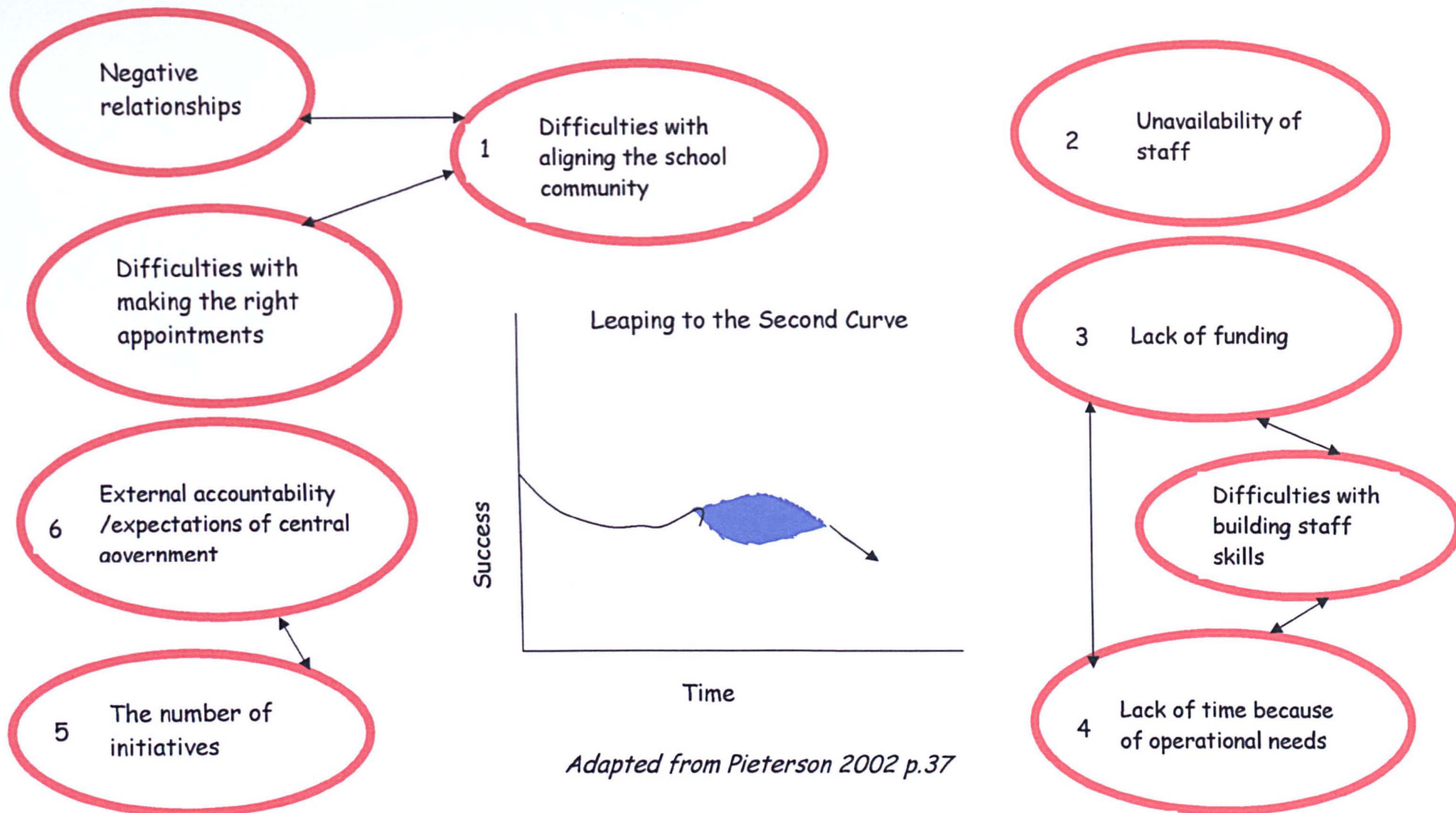
Diagram 2. What hinders head teachers in taking strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools

From the findings a number of implications for head teachers arise which, it will be argued, will be of value to them as they seek to take strategic actions in their schools which will help meet the needs of their pupils over three to five years. Each of these implications will be examined and, where appropriate, the value of the findings to specific groups identified. The numbering of the implications does not signify a rank order of importance.

Implications:

1. There are dominant helping and hindering factors that affect the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions;

2. The factors that help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions may change over time;

3. Aligning members of the school community is important;

4. There are differences in the nature of helping and hindering factors;

5. Factors are not distinct and impact on each other;

6. Generalization is not being claimed for the findings; they may not be applicable to all schools in different situations.

1. There are dominant helping and hindering factors that affect the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions

The research identified six dominant helping factors and six dominant hindering factors to head teachers being able to take strategic actions. Whilst generalization is not being claimed the rich description allows head teachers, and others concerned with helping schools to meet their three to five year aims, for example governors, to compare their own school situations with the findings. The finding that there are dominant helping and hindering factors implies that it would be worth head teachers spending time and effort on the dominant helping factors (diagram 1) and seeking to minimize the hindering factors (diagram 2) when seeking to meet the three to five year aims of the their schools. Therefore, when considering their medium term plans head teachers, and others involved in the planning discussions could usefully discuss how they might seek to align the school community in order to improve standards in reading and writing over a three year period, for example, or how they could minimize the hindering factor of the unavailability of staff when planning to develop a shared approach to leadership. The research findings about the dominant helping and hindering factors could therefore valuably inform training for school leaders and governors on strategic planning and inform conversations between local authority advisers or school improvement partners with head teachers on how they seek to meet the school's three to five year aims and what might help or hinder these aims being achieved.

2. *The factors that help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions may change over time*

It is acknowledged that the dominant helping and hindering factors that emerged in the research may not be dominant in the future. For example, the amount of funding available to schools may significantly increase or with a falling birth rate there may be an abundance of appropriate staff available to take up posts of responsibility. The implication of this is that head teachers should review and reflect on the factors that may be helping or hindering them to take strategic actions, in discussion with members of the school community such as the governing body and the leadership team, in order to maximise the effect of helping factors and minimise the effect of hindering factors.

3. *Aligning members of the school community is important*

Alignment was the only factor that emerged as both a dominant helping factor and a dominant hindering factor to head teachers being able to take strategic actions. This finding suggests that alignment is a key factor which head teachers should strive for in order to help meet their schools' medium term aims. This finding may be of particular value to newly appointed head teachers as they seek to put their vision for the school into practice, the vision they may well have shared as part of the interview process with the

governing body. The research suggests that it is valuable for head teachers to spend time and effort on aligning and will inform the researcher's induction and support for newly appointed head teachers.

With closer links between schools and other agencies being made as part of central government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda (Children Act 2004) and schools becoming part of extended provision (Education Act 2002 section 27) striving to align the broader community may be a very useful factor for all school leaders in helping their schools to meet these changing expectations of schools and their place in the community.

However, alignment cannot be considered in isolation as the findings show that alignment is affected by relationships and the ability to make appointments. This finding suggests that in order to align the school community the head teacher could valuably put effort into building positive relationships and in appointing people who will help the school meet its three to five year aims.

Although the literature relating to alignment in schools had suggested that aligning the staff and governors were key (Pietersen 2002, Senge 1990, Hastings 2004) the research revealed that aligning other groups in the

school community was also important, that is, the pupils and the parents. This finding may well be of interest to all head teachers, including those newly appointed, as it suggests that it is worth maximising the alignment of pupils and parents as well as staff and governors.

Although this research suggests that aligning the school community is key to a head teacher being able to take strategic actions, finding out what processes head teachers use to enable this alignment to take place would be a further area for research.

4. *Differences between the nature of the dominant helping and hindering factors*

There were some differences between the dominant factors that were identified as helping and those that were identified as hindering. Helping factors were primarily about *people,* that is staffing and personnel, and *knowledge and experience,* whereas hindering factors, whilst including some areas related to *people,* also included factors concerned with *time, resources, initiatives and external accountability.* This is not surprising as head teachers are perhaps unlikely to take the view, for example, that they have too much time or too much funding.

In relation to factors which help head teachers to take strategic actions the dominant factors which emerged were those relating to *people* and *knowledge and experience* and not *resources, time, initiatives or external accountability.* This would suggest that for head teachers to take strategic actions, and therefore help their schools meet their medium term aims, they should maximise their efforts in the factors relating to people and knowledge and experience and, in particular, the six factors which emerged as being the most helpful.

Although head teachers may be aware of the factors that help or hinder them to take strategic actions, a considerable number of the factors they view as being outside of their control and affect their ability, therefore, to take strategic actions. Not surprisingly, the head teachers interviewed viewed hindering factors as situations outside of their control. Examples included: the amount of funding available; the unavailability of staff because of sickness; the number of initiatives from central government.

5. *Factors impact on each other*

From the findings it is clear that factors affecting the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions are not distinct factors but that factors impact on each other. For example, a lack of funding impacts on the amount

of time and, therefore, the ability to build skills. Therefore, for a head teacher to take strategic actions in order to meet the medium term aims of the school, it is not just a matter of ensuring that one or more particular factors are in place or in ensuring that certain hindering factors are not in place. This finding will be of value to head teachers, especially those new to post, as they build the school's capacity to improve over a three to five year period. It is not sufficient to ensure that one helping factor is in place, for example alignment, but one also needs to build positive relationships and seek to appoint appropriate staff. Head teachers need to consider and act upon more than one factor at a time.

6. *Generalization is not being claimed*

Generalizabilty is also not being claimed for the findings as the research was carried out with a small sample of head teachers. Head teachers in different contexts, for example in a different phase of school, may not relate their experience to the findings. However, descriptions of the findings and extracts from the interviews allow readers to compare the findings with their own situations and to consider the possible implications of the findings for their own practice.

Summary of the findings and discussion

In this chapter factors that help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools have been identified. Six dominant helping factors emerged and six dominant hindering factors. The findings have been compared to the literature and any differences explained. When considering the implications of the findings the value of these to head teachers and those supporting them has been explored.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Having identified what helps or hinders primary head teachers to take strategic actions and sought to understand the head teachers' understanding of these factors, in this final chapter the chosen methodology and theoretical model are evaluated. Consideration is given to how the research might be improved if carried out again. Implications for policy and practice are reflected upon in light of any recent research or developments and suggestions for further research identified.

The structure of the chapter is:

A. The principal features of the study

B. An evaluation of the methodology

C. An evaluation of the theoretical model

D. Reflections on implications for policy and practice in light of very recent research and developments

E. Suggestions for further research

A. Principal features of this study

The study used a qualitative approach in order to answer the question 'what helps or hinders primary school head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the medium term success of their schools'?

The data is rich with thick descriptions of the understandings of the head teachers interviewed. This allows for readers to evaluate the findings against their own experiences but as the sample was small generalization is not claimed. As far as can be ascertained, the research focus has not been an area of previous study. The findings, therefore, contribute to the literature and will be of use for training and support purposes with head teachers seeking to achieve medium term success for their schools.

B. Evaluation of the chosen methodology

When evaluating the methodology the question 'if I was doing this research again, is there anything I would do differently?' has underpinned the process supported by the valuable questions posed by Denscombe (1998 p.237).

The qualitative approach chosen, within an interpretive paradigm, has answered the key research question and the semi-structured interviews produced thick descriptions and opportunities for the head teachers to

share their understandings and experience of what helped or hindered them to take strategic actions. A quantitative approach, for example structured questionnaires with a large sample of head teachers, might have helped to identify what helps or hinders head teachers to take strategic actions but would have provided insufficient data to *understand* the head teachers' views using their own subjective terms and meanings. The focus of the research is of relevance to head teachers and those who support them and, as will be illustrated later in this chapter, is related to very recent research and articles in the literature.

It is acknowledged that the scale of the research was limited as there were interviews with just ten head teachers from one local authority. The sample selected for the interviews met the criteria. However, there were some variations in the data that might affect the results but the sample was not large enough to make this explicit. Only two head teachers were from schools with less than one hundred and fifty pupils and both referred to limitations of funding and some difficulties with being able to provide a career structure. However, others in the sample also mentioned these factors and so it was not possible to ascertain whether these factors are more apparent in smaller schools than larger ones. For the practical reasons of obtaining clearance for the head teachers to be approached and the time

constraints, only head teachers were invited to take part from one local authority with a total of just under seventy primary phase schools available. Future research would ideally take place with a larger field from which to draw a sample with fewer variables, for example in pupil numbers.

In order for the interviewees to feel as relaxed as possible all the interviews took place in the head teachers' offices. Following the pilot interviews it was decided to suggest that the interviews took place outside of the school day to eliminate interruptions. However, only one head teacher asked for the interview to be after the school day and the remaining nine took place in school time. This did cause some disruption to the flow of the interview because of telephone calls but only in one instance. In another instance noise from the nearby road caused some difficulty with small parts of the transcription. If this research were to be repeated the importance of having a quiet, uninterrupted space would be stressed further with those to be interviewed.

The use of a single researcher, who was known professionally to the interviewees, may have meant that it was not entirely possible to eradicate the effect of the researcher's role in relation to those interviewed and the honesty of the responses. However, steps were taken to eliminate this as far as possible. For example, those interviewed were asked it the

researcher's role had affected their responses, the transcriptions were checked and signed off by all those interviewed and an inter-coder was used. If time permitted, and access could be arranged, future research may be carried out with head teachers from outside the researcher's local authority.

The use of an external transcriber was beneficial in that it allowed more time for analysis and helped to reduce any bias in the transcribing process and to ensure accuracy. The disadvantage of using an external transcriber was that the researcher needed to read through the transcriptions very thoroughly to gain further insight into what was being said as someone else had done the transcribing. However, the benefits of an external transcriber outweighed this one negative factor. The coding and analysis took longer than expected and the time scale of the research had to be adjusted. Although the pilot interviews were very helpful in improving the quality of the data collected, insufficient time was initially allocated to practising the coding process and the necessary re-coding of the interview transcriptions. A more realistic timescale would be provided for any future research.

Although the research question was answered through the methodology chosen, and the data reflects the understanding and experiences of the head teachers, the data was not triangulated from either documentation or the views of other members of the school community. However, it was the views of the head teachers that were being sought to answer the research question and documentation would not necessarily have provided evidence to support their views. For example, an improvement in pupils' reading results or an increased number of pupils on roll over a three year period would not necessarily be just affected by the factors identified by the head teachers. Seeking the views of other members of the school community as to what helps or hinders strategic actions would be a different, if related, research focus.

Saturation was not reached from the sample but generalization is not being claimed and readers can use the thick data to relate to their own experiences and understandings.

C. Evaluation of the theoretical model

A constructionist approach is justified, as the head teachers in the sample were able to share their own understandings and experiences of what helped or hindered them to take strategic actions. Taking strategic actions

is a part of leadership and there are no set answers to how head teachers may seek to achieve medium term success for their schools. Although the interviews were semi-structured no pre-prepared list of possible factors was shared in any way with those interviewed. The interview prompt sheet suggested areas for the head teachers to consider, for example, what might help or hinder them to take actions that are related to learning, but did not pre-empt any factors that they might identify. Time was given for head teachers to reflect on their responses during the interview, again without prompting any particular helping or hindering factors and the head teachers were given the opportunity to add to their interview transcriptions if they wished.

The head teachers were able to describe the reality of leadership, of which taking strategic actions are a part, in the context of their own schools and experiences using their own words to illustrate their subjective views.

D. Reflections on implications for policy and practice in light of very recent research and developments

In chapter 4 the implications for policy and practice were identified and discussed. The importance of the findings was described and the possible

uses of the findings for training and support purposes with head teachers illustrated. The six implications of the findings were:

1. There are dominant helping and hindering factors which affect the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions;

2. The factors which help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions may change over time;

3. Aligning members of the school community is important;

4. There are differences in the nature of helping and hindering factors;

5. Factors are not distinct and impact on each other;

6. Generalization is not being claimed for the findings; they may not be applicable to all schools in different situations.

These implications will be reflected upon in light of research and developments since this study took place.

There are dominant helping and hindering factors which affect the ability of head teachers to take strategic actions; there are differences in the nature of helping and hindering factors

From September 2006 all secondary phase schools and a proportion of primary phase schools will be working with school improvement partners,

rather than local authority link advisers. All primary phase schools will have school improvement partners from 2007. School improvement partners will be working as 'critical professional friends to schools helping their leadership to evaluate the school's performance, identify priorities for improvement and plan effective change' (DfES 2005 p. 19). If schools are to achieve success in the medium term an awareness of what helps or hinders head teachers to take strategic actions, as well as understanding which factors are most beneficial, will be of use to school improvement partners as they work with head teachers to plan effective change.

As one of the three strengths identified as necessary for school improvement partners is to be able to make judgements 'about a wide range of effective strategies for school improvement' (DfES 2005 p.14) the implication from this study that there are differences in the nature of helping and hindering factors will be of value to them as they support head teachers in maximising the helping factors and the ones over which they can have the most control, e.g. that it is worthwhile spending time on developing people and building knowledge and experience to ensure the medium term success of a school.

The factors that help or hinder head teachers' ability to take strategic actions may change over time

It has been acknowledged in the findings chapter that the factors that help or hinder head teachers to take strategic actions may change over time. However, in publications since this research was conducted similar helping and hindering factors that impact on a school's capacity to improve over time have been identified by practising head teachers and academics as the following examples illustrate: the benefits of strategic conversations (Spencer 2006 p.29); the importance of getting parents working with the school Davies 2006 p.43); the hindering effect of the school's day-to-day operational needs (Davies and Davies 2006 p.136); frustrations caused by the number of new initiatives (Cawley 2006 p.43).

Aligning members of the school community is important; generalization is not being claimed for the findings, they may not be applicable to all schools in different situations

Research carried out by Davies and Davies (2006 p.136) highlighted the 'need to have people heading in the same direction sharing the same values, beliefs and future view' and supports the findings of this study in that getting every one working in the same direction is of benefit to the medium term success of the school. Davies and Davies' piece of research was

carried out with twenty-three schools: ten primary, ten secondary and three special schools. Although generalization is not being claimed for this study, as the sample size was only ten and in one phase of schooling, it is interesting to note that alignment was judged to be of value in the larger sample by Davies and Davies and suggests that the findings of this study will have wider relevance.

Factors are not distinct and impact on each other

A very recent guidance document produced for schools on improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning states that school improvement plans need to be 'linked to the school's longer-term strategic aims and designed to have the greatest impact on pupils' achievement' (Ofsted 2006 p.16). The findings of this research would suggest that as well as the benefit of understanding which factors may best help or hinder strategic actions, thus helping to achieve the school's strategic aims, head teachers, and those working with them in the school improvement planning process, would also benefit from appreciating that factors impact on each other. For example, that to maximise alignment the ability to make appointments and building positive relationships is beneficial or that a lack of funding also impacts on the time available and the ability to build staff skills. Such understanding may well help school leaders as

they seek to produce a school improvement plan that 'helps to ensure that action is targeted to have the greatest impact' (Ofsted 2006 p.16).

E. Suggestions for further research

The research was limited to a small sample of head teachers from one phase, primary, in one local authority. To aid application to a potential wider audience the research could be replicated with head teachers from other geographical areas or from other phases to ascertain whether similar key factors emerge.

Studying the views of other members of the school community as to what helps or hinders schools to achieve medium term success could expand the research. For example, researching the views of staff and governors. This could be compared and contrasted with the views of head teachers and of use to schools when working with their school communities on achieving success over a three to five year period ensuring that the views of others, and not just the head teachers themselves, are taken into account.

To develop the research further the processes employed by head teachers to align members of the school community could be usefully studied as

alignment emerged as a key helping factor for a school to achieve success

over a three to five year period.

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Appendices

A. The interview guide
B. Invitation letter to head teachers to take part and consent pro forma
C. Letter to interviewees about the areas of questioning
D. Letter to interviewees to check transcriptions
E. Information about the research sample

Appendix A

Interview number: **Recorder reference:**

Interview guide & notes on body language and reactions
Research purpose: to understand what helps or hinders head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to mid term success (3 - 5 years) of their school?
Time of interview: Date: Location:
Interviewer: Interviewee:
Size of school: Age range of pupils: No. of years as HT:

Recap on consent, use of tapes & data.. HT can ask for the tape and any notes taken and request data not to be used. The analysis will not be judgemental but seek to understand what helps / hinders. Results will not be attributable to individuals.

Briefly describe the research purpose & understanding of strategic actions: the actions taken to ensure the school meets the needs of the pupils in three to five years time by achieving the school's mid-term goals.

Could you identify any major initiatives you instigated (to have impact in 3 - 5 years)?

For those that were implemented what were the factors which helped? (prompt on school characteristics not personal characteristics)

For those that weren't seen through what were the factors that prevented this?

What might help or hinder you in taking actions that are about visioning – activities concerned with building a picture of what the school aspires to be in the future & providing a clear sense of direction that everyone can understand and act upon?

What might help or hinder you in taking actions that are related to learning – learning
new approaches and skills to meet the future needs of the school?

What might help or hinder you in taking actions that are related to structures – developing a (staffing) structure that enable the future vision of the school to be realised?

Any other thoughts /ideas?

Were your responses affected by my role as an adviser in this LEA?

Thank the person for participating. Assure him/her of confidentiality & use of data. Recap on consent, use of tapes & data. HT can ask for the tape and any notes taken and request data not to be used.

Reflections following the interview and listening to the tape (before transcription)

UNIVERSITY OF HULL ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSENT FOR RESEARCH

I,   of   School

Hereby agree to be a participant in this study to be undertaken
by Angela Jensen, an EdD student with the University of Hull

and I understand that the purpose of the research is to study the factors helping
or hindering the ability of head teachers to act strategically.

I understand:
1.   The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the
research study have been explained to me
2.   I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such research
study
3.   I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes, be
made available to officers of Swindon LEA, Swindon head teachers and chairs of
governors and may be reported in educational journals
4.   Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on
my authorisation
5.   The name of any individual head teacher, member of the school community,
school or geographical area will not be cited in the research
6.   I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event
my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information
obtained from me will not be used
7.   That I may raise any concerns about the conduct of this research by contacting
the Secretary, Institute for Learning Ethics Committee, University of Hull,
Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX.Tel: 01482 465988

Signature: Date:

Sanford House
Sanford St
Swindon SN1 1QH
Direct line: 01793 463908
Email: ajensen@swindon.gov.uk

14th March 2005

Proposed Research for a Doctorate in Education

Dear

I am about to undertake the research for my thesis for a doctorate in educational leadership at the University of Hull.

The purpose of the research is to identify the factors which help or hinder primary phase head teachers to take strategic actions that lead to the mid term success, that is, in three to five years time, of their schools.

I hope to interview 10 head teachers who:
- Are willing to take part
- Are willing to be interviewed for about 1 ½ hours in term 5 or 6 of 2005
- Are willing to sign the attached consent form which includes information about the ownership and use of the data collected
- Have a school improvement plan which includes planning for the next 3 - 5 years
- Have been a head teacher in one school for at least five years
- Are able/ willing to provide examples of having taken strategic actions, that is, actions which have led to success over three to five years.

If you are willing and able to assist me in this research please complete and return the attached form and sign and return this letter. An addressed envelope is enclosed for your response. If you have any queries or questions before deciding whether or not to take part please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Jensen

——

I   Head Teacher of   School

am willing to take part in the proposed research and I have read the conditions and criteria.
Please return to Angela Jensen, School Improvement Service, Sanford House, Sanford St, Swindon, Wiltshire. SN1 1QH by April 15th 2005.

Appendix C

Sanford House
Sanford St
Swindon SN1 1QH
Tel: 01793 463908
Email: ajensen@swindon.gov.uk
4th July 2005

Dear ...

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my doctorate research. I look forward to the interview which we agreed will be on **Tuesday 19th July at 9.30 am** at ... Primary School.

I appreciate you have already had information about the purpose and scope of the research but I thought it may be helpful to have some information about the areas of questioning before the interview. The interview is semi –structured so further questions may arise out of your responses.

The areas of questioning are:

- Example (s) of major initiatives in your school which had an impact over three to five years and the actions you took to implement these initiatives

- For major initiatives which were implemented what were the factors that helped you take action

- For any initiatives that weren't seen through what were the preventing factors.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Jensen

Appendix D

Angela Jensen: Doctorate interviews

Research focus: what helps or hinders head teachers to take strategic actions, that is, actions taken to ensure the school meets the needs of the pupils in three to five years time by achieving the school's goals.

Dear

Thank you very much helping with my research. I would be very grateful if you would read through the enclosed transcript and check it is faithful to what you said. There may be a couple of comments by either you or me that the recorder did not pick up. Please add any changes or add any additional comments you wish to make in the notes column and return with this form. Thank you.

I have read the transcript of the interview and have noted any changes or additional comments.

Signed:_____

Date: _____

Please return to me at Sanford House. Thank you.

Angela Jensen

Appendix E

Information about the research sample:

Number 1:
Primary school with 490 pupils
Head teacher in second headship: 14 years as a head teacher; 5 years at present school

Number 2:
Primary school with 303 pupils
Head teacher in second headship: 16 years as a head teacher; 10 years at present school.

Number 3:
Primary school with 335 pupils
Head teacher in second headship: 9 years as a head teacher; 5 years at present school

Number 4:
Primary school with 452 pupils
Head teacher in first headship: 5 years as a head teacher

Number 5:
Infant school with 285 pupils
Head teacher in second headship: 8 years as a head teacher; 5 years at present school

Number 6:
Junior school with 423 pupils
Head teacher in third headship: 22 years as a head teacher; 5 years at present school

Number 7:
Infant school with 117 pupils
Head teacher in first headship: 10 years as head teacher

Number 8:
Primary school with 380 pupils
Head teacher in second headship: 20 years as a head teacher; 13 years at present school

Number 9:
Primary school with 139 pupils
Head teacher in first headship: 23 years as head teacher

Number 10:
Primary school with 429 pupils
Head teacher in second head ship: 22 years a head teacher; 15 years at present school