

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**Good to Great Schools –  
the relevance of a business model to a school context**

**being a Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education (Ed.D)  
in the University of Hull**

**by**

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## Abstract

### ‘Good to Great Schools’

– the relevance of a business model to a school context.

The purpose of this thesis is to apply an existing model to a new situation: In this instance to explore the possible relevance of the research of Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great* (2001) to a sample of ten UK schools.

The review of literature considers the Collins’ research, responses to that research and the extent to which it has already been applied to different contexts. In parallel to this, material on school effectiveness is considered with a focus on those aspects which are associated with excellence in schools. Conceptual links are identified.

A multiple-case study approach is taken in the research and the methodology includes the analysis of Ofsted reports for schools included on HMCI’s List of Outstanding Schools. A purposive sample of ten schools is identified for further consideration where the views of school leaders are explored through semi-structured interviews. Responses are coded in relation to the key concepts from the Collins’ research alongside additional categories which emerged from the interviews.

It is acknowledged that the very nature of this small-scale study has an impact on the transferability of findings and therefore its reliability. There is an attempt to replicate elements of the interviews from the Collins study although it is accepted that a reproduction of a similar scale would not be feasible. The richness of data that emerges from the cases begins to create a context for judgements about the possibility of transfer of findings to other situations but that is not in the aim or the scope of this research – it is to find out the extent of relevance of the Collins findings to the context of ten schools.

The study concludes that there is evidence that the 'Good to Great' research findings have some relevance to the cases studied. Whilst it is deemed inappropriate to extrapolate the findings of these case studies to a larger context, these findings do suggest that further investigation may be worthwhile and enlightening.



## Introduction

The Thesis Guide (University of Hull, 2005:3) gives 'applying existing models to new situations' as an appropriate example for thesis material. The existing model for this thesis derives from the research of Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great* (2001). The new situation for this study is a sample of ten UK schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the possible relevance of the Collins model to the sample of schools.

Collins and his team undertook a five year research project which considered 1,435 companies and finally cut to eleven companies in a *Good to Great* 'set' which were weighed against comparator companies. The study proposes a number of elements which contributed to differences between the great companies and their comparator companies, which were often successful, but not to the same degree as the great companies. Seven 'Key Concepts' are presented from the research and these are briefly set out below:

*Level 5 Leadership* – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

*First Who...Then What* – *Good to Great* leaders first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, the right people in the right seats – and then they figured out where to drive it.

*Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)* – unwavering faith that one can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties and at the same time to have the discipline to confront the brutal facts of the current reality, whatever they might be.

*The Hedgehog Concept* – to focus on the *core business*, and to make that core business something you can be the best at.

*A Culture of Discipline* – No need for excessive controls – disciplined people with disciplined thought with an ethic of entrepreneurship to create great performance.

*Technology Accelerators* – the companies studied did not use technology as the primary means of igniting transformation, although they were pioneers of carefully selected technologies to support other strategies.

*The Flywheel and the Doom Loop* – The *Good to Great* transformation never happened in one fell swoop – rather the process resembled relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, and building up momentum until and beyond a point of breakthrough. This was contrasted with successive short term transformation programmes which could send a company into a ‘doom loop’.

The writer was introduced to Collins’ work by the then UK Schools Standards Minister, David Miliband, speaking at the Technology Colleges Trust Conference, in November 2002:

‘Good to great. Good schools to great schools, a good system to a great one. To do that we need every school to have the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship of the best specialist schools. To move from being good to great is an absolutely enormous challenge. It consists of the relentless focus on results that deliver incremental change and also the power of innovation that delivers step change...One could almost say it is easier to move from being poor to mediocre or average than it is to go from good to great. Think about it – failing schools are obvious, coasting schools are less so; failing schools offer a moral imperative to change, coasting schools are excused; for failing schools the remedies are patent, for coasting schools are more complex.’

Miliband even presented an interpretation of the Key Concepts from Collins' book in a form which was appropriate to an audience of school leaders and which was adapted to suit a government agenda:

'Jim Collins identifies five factors as the key to moving from good to great:

- Excellent leaders - people with passion for raising standards, but an unwavering openness to change and faith in people rather than structure
  
- A resolute focus of people - not some bolted-on driver but placed right at the heart of change. How the best organisations shatter their ceilings of mediocrity.
  
- The strength to use data - facts that tell you what's not working as much as what is.
  
- Unshakeable tenacity - to go from build-up to breakthrough, no matter how long or hard the road.
  
- And a readiness to use technology as a means for transformation rather than just a way to do the same things quicker.'

He concluded by holding up this model as a challenge and a vision for the future system of education in the UK:

'There is a great prize. Our values are clear – a commitment to the equal worth of every student. Our goal is evident – a high aspiration, high achievement system. The means are in our grasp – a system founded on empowerment and accountability, the centre adding value to local efforts, Heads and teachers leading the way. Good to great is the right vision for our country.' (Miliband, 2002)

The significance of this research also has more local imperatives, in that the author is a serving headteacher, actively working on progressing a school from

*Good to Great*. The question of the relevance of the model to schools is also implicit in Collins' introduction.

I don't primarily think of my work as about the study of business, nor do I see this as fundamentally a business book. Rather, I see my work as being about discovering what creates enduring great organisations of any type.

(Collins, 2001:15)

The Literature Review considers the Collin's research, responses to that research and the extent to which it has already been applied to different contexts. In parallel to this, material on school effectiveness will be considered with a focus on those aspects which are associated with excellence in schools.

The Review pursues three aims – firstly, to provide an insight into the work of Collins and the model from *Good to Great* and to consider this in a new context of literature which focuses on educational research. A second aim is to explore the level of connectivity between the Collins study and a range of perspectives on school effectiveness and excellence. The notion of connectivity of the model in this new context is captured in a conceptual *Web of Relationships*. The third aim is to establish a sound basis for the research project.

The Methodology section of this thesis sets out the elements of the Collins model and rehearses the research question, testing this against relevant literature and guidance and deconstructing it to enhance clarity. The possible scope of the research and the constraints of time and cost are considered. The research approach is explored within the context of established views in social sciences. The research method of multiple case study is considered with reference to appropriate precedents and the concept of sampling is investigated in order to establish justification for the sample chosen for the research. There follows a consideration of the semi-structured interview as a suitable research tool before coding is looked at as a method for data analysis. The likely reliability and validity of this research project are anticipated in the light of relevant literature and then the description of the research activity is reviewed and the interview

schedule introduced. The object of the methodology write-up is to establish a context and a firm foundation for the research activity.

The discussion of findings is undertaken from a number of different perspectives:

- An analysis of each individual case study in relation to the Key Concepts from Collins' *Good to Great*.
- An interpretation of main themes which emerged across the range of interviews from the single quasi-quantitative question in the interview schedule. Connections between the themes and the Collins Key Concepts are then considered.
- An analysis of the *Good to Great* Key Concepts which compares the case studies and draws evidence from across all the interviews.
- A consideration of the most prominent sub-codes in the form of key messages.

Conclusions are drawn from this study in relation to each of the perspectives explored above. In addition the central question of the research project is revisited and a response offered, qualified by the scope of the study and appropriate considerations of reliability and validity.

That good is the enemy of great is not just a business problem. It is a human problem. If we have cracked the code on the question of good to great, we should have something of value to any type of organisation. Good schools might become great schools. Good newspapers might become great newspapers. Good churches might become great churches. Good government agencies might become great agencies. And good companies might become great companies. (Collins, 2001:16)

# Literature Review

## Introduction

In this review of literature, the first aim is to provide the reader with an insight into the work of Jim Collins and his model for *Good to Great* which was formulated from an extensive study of US businesses. This thesis asks the question as to what extent the *Good to Great* model may provide a framework for some schools in the UK and so the relevance of the model has been explored in a new context of literature which focuses on educational research. The second aim then is to explore the level of connectivity between the Collins study and a range of perspectives on school effectiveness and excellence. A third aim is to establish a sound basis for further research – applying the *Good to Great* model in the context of some UK schools.

The review begins by considering the axiom ‘Good to Great’ and then by showing how the Collins’ model has already been included on the agenda for British schools. There is an exploration of the potential tensions between research in a business environment and studies in an educational setting before a brief review of literature on school effectiveness. These threads are then brought together in a *Web of Relationships* which places the Collins *Good to Great* principles at the centre.

From this point, each of the Key Concepts from the Collins model is considered in turn, the relationship of each of these to an educational context is explored further, and the main features of each principle are highlighted to support the research activity which will follow.

## Good to Great

Collins (2001:1) begins the main section of his book with the words - 'Good is the enemy of great.' This expression has been articulated since the time of the French writer, Voltaire, who in discussion with a group of military generals, declared that: 'The best is the enemy of the good' (*Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien*, Source: *La Bégueule*, 1772) Although the quotation also appears in Italian in 1764 in the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie* article, 'Dramatic Art', (*Il meglio è l'inimico del bene*). This axiom has found repeated use in a military setting:

- 'The greatest enemy of a good plan is the dream of a perfect plan.' - Prussian General Karl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 1832
- 'Perfect is the enemy of good enough', - Soviet Admiral Sergei Georgievich Gorshkov

It is taken out of the martial context in Stephen Covey's successful book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, (1989): 'You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage - pleasantly, smilingly, non-apologetically to say 'no' to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger 'yes' burning inside. The enemy of the 'best' is often the 'good.'

Within three lines Collins (2001:1) first relates this turn of phrase to schools, 'We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools.'

Collins went on to consider the relevance of the *Good to Great* model in the social sectors in his monograph of 2005 and, in doing so, has begun to explore the significance of the framework to public schooling and other educational institutions.

Brian Fidler in *Strategic Planning for School Improvement* (1996:10) identifies a number of distinctive features of not-for-profit organizations, compared to most commercial organizations: They generally have more diffuse aims and have a strong service ethic. They are generally judged and are influenced to a great

extent by political considerations. Finally, and perhaps most critically, their clients do not usually fund the service directly.

This last feature, which is shared with publicly funded schools, means that income and client satisfaction are not directly related. Whilst there may be high client satisfaction, funding may go down for quite unconnected reasons. This also means that greater income cannot be raised by increasing the client satisfaction of existing clients, because they are not in a position to pay more for the service provided. Thus there may be two different agendas: one concerned with providing a good service and the other concerned with pleasing paymasters who may have a rather different political set of criteria for judgment. In the UK, the Education Reform Act (1988) and Local Management of Schools (LMS) have attempted, in part, to make a connection between the school's income and the service it provides.

Hentschke (2003:271), in considering the 'business of education', recognizes that until recently, the industrialized fields of education and business framed as antithetical, pursuing contradictory goals as 'partners on behalf of children', and that coincident with the world's steady emergence from the industrial age to the information age, the value of education (and the cost of lack of education) has fuelled a great increase in demand for schooling. As a consequence, new issues, and old policies in education are in contest, and many are reflective of forces far beyond education. Performance competes with compliance as a means for oversight. Private choice competes with public assignment in the allocation of services. Household demand competes with provider supply in debates on equity. Access to private capital competes with appropriation of public resources to fuel organizations. Private benefits of education compete with the public good elements of education as a means for regional development. Comprehensive reach competes with focus niche in mission development. Minimal, but broadly spread equity competes with maximal but selective excellence in public policy. 'Competition' itself competes with 'cooperation' as institutional strategy. And the distinctive and separate character of each of the three major economic sectors in education is dissolving.



As knowledge becomes the most valued commodity in the economics of the business world, so the quality of education becomes more highly prized. Numerous commentators on trends in society have stressed that we are entering a period of profound change. The Demos report (Jupp, Fairly and Bentley, 2001:4) says that:

‘We are witnessing a fundamental transition in the underlying structure of the economy... away from an industrial model... Knowledge is now the primary source of economic productivity... This transition represents a longer wave of change in the evolution and structure of all industries, the nature of work and the definition of economic value.’

Collins gives a subtitle to his monograph, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (2005), which is *Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer* – he rejects the idea that the primary path to greatness in social sector organisations is to ‘become more like a business’ (Collins, 2005:1). He does, however, believe that the *Good to Great* principles are just as relevant to social, non-business organisations.

The critical distinction is not between business and social, but between great and good. We need to reject the naïve imposition of the ‘language of business’ on the social sectors, and instead jointly embrace a *language of greatness*. (Collins, 2005:2)

The point raised by Fidler above, that there is a disconnection between income and customer satisfaction is recognised by Collins as the fundamental difference between business and social sectors: ‘In business, money is both an input (a resource for achieving greatness) and an output (a measure of greatness). In the social sectors, money is only an input, and not a measure of greatness.’ (Collins, 2005:5) Collins articulates this issue as the need to define ‘Great’ and calibrating success without ‘business metrics’. He defines a great organisation as one that delivers superior performance and makes a distinctive impact over a long period of time. He recognises that for a business, financial returns are a legitimate measure of performance but that for a social sector organisation, performance must be assessed relative to mission, not financial returns. He also acknowledges that it is not always possible to quantify results but claims that it would then be

appropriate to rigorously assemble evidence – quantitative or qualitative to track progress. – For Collins (2005:8), ‘what matters is not finding the perfect indicator, but settling upon a consistent and intelligent method of assessing output results and tracking trajectory with rigor.’

In order to explore the relevance of Collins’ *Good to Great* model to schools, it would be helpful to understand the nature and density of connectivity between it and a context of work on school effectiveness.

The roots of school effectiveness research in both the US and UK could arguably be traced back to the challenge of ‘conventional wisdom’ framed by Bernstein (1970:344) as ‘education cannot compensate for society’.

During the 1960s, in the US, descriptive studies were produced of schools that were considered to be effective. The question that became central was why were there some schools which seemed to get good educational results despite having students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The hope was that if such schools could be identified, researchers could ascertain their differences from more typical schools and then school reforms based on effective school practices could be introduced and ineffective schools transformed into effective ones.

Using a variety of measures to identify ‘effective schools’ the first studies identified ‘outlier’ schools that were performing much better and much worse than average. Researchers studied these schools and identified what they considered to be the characteristics of the effective ones. Purkey and Smith (1983:429) commented that: ‘...reviews do not always find the same features to be characteristic of effective schools, even when considering basically the same literature...(and).. while all reviews assume that effective schools can be differentiated from ineffectiveness, there is no consensus yet on just what the salient characteristics happen to be.’.

One of the most influential among a number of lists produced was that of Edmonds (1979) which highlighted five factors of the effective school: strong leadership of the principal; emphasis on mastery of basic skills; a clean, orderly

and secure school environment; high teacher expectations of pupil performance; and frequent monitoring of students to assess their progress.

In Britain in the 1970s it was the work of Rutter and his colleagues in a study of London schools (1979), which led to a change in the intellectual climate as regards the power of the school. Their work highlighted that schools with markedly similar intakes serving similar catchment areas had different outcomes. This pioneering study claimed that effective schools were characterised by 'the degree of academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, the availability of incentives and rewards, good conditions for pupils, and the extent to which children are able to take responsibility.' (Rutter et. al., 1979:178). These findings were later supported by Mortimore et. al. (1988) in a study of London primary schools and Smith and Tomlinson's (1989) of multi-racial comprehensive schools. The Mortimore study was notable for the wide range of outcomes on which schools were assessed (including mathematics, reading, writing, attendance, behaviour and attitudes to school) and for the collection of data on school and classroom processes. The Smith and Tomlinson research is notable for the large differences shown in the academic effectiveness between schools and for the substantial variation it reported on results in different school subjects, reflecting the influence of different school departments. For example, a school that was positioned 'first' in mathematics attainment was 'fifteenth' in English achievement (after allowance had been made for intake quality).

Studies undertaken in a variety of contexts, on different age groups, and in different countries (the United States, Netherlands, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), confirmed the existence of significant differences between schools in achievements of students. The approach adopted by the great majority of the researchers was quantitative, with empirical data being collected on intakes into schools, on outputs (both academic and social) from schools, and on classroom and social processes that appear to be associated with lower or higher gains than expected in student achievement. By 1990 in the first issue of a journal devoted to school effectiveness and school improvement the editors were able to claim confidently 'schools matter, that schools do have major effects upon children's

development and that, to put it simply, schools do make a difference' (Reynolds and Creemers 1990:1).

As Reynolds and Creemers (1990:1) argue, interest in school effectiveness and improvement has been 'fuelled by the central place that educational quality (and sometimes equity) issues have assumed in the policy concerns of most developed and many developing societies'. In Britain as education entered centre stage politically with *The Great Debate*, issues such as general standards, the achievements of comprehensive schools, the effects of particular teaching and learning styles and the relative educational achievements of different ethnic groups were raised and the notion of the 'effective school' became a centre of debate in the educational community. At roughly the same time as the research community focused on school effectiveness, HMIs in England and Wales were beginning to identify from their inspections of individual schools the factors which in their judgement were associated with The Good School. In *Ten Good Schools* (HMI 1977) the good school is described as one that shows 'quality in its aims, its oversight of pupils, its curriculum design, in standards of teaching and academic achievements and in its links with the local community. What they all have in common is effective leadership and a 'climate' that is conducive to growth.'(HMI 1977:36). The model of the effective school contained within these early documents is the one that is still contained within The Framework for the Inspection of Schools in England and Wales:

Mortimore (1991:9) has defined an effective school as one in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. In other words an effective school adds extra value to its students' outcomes in comparison with other schools serving similar intakes. By contrast an ineffective school is one in which students make less progress than expected given their characteristics at intake. (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995:3).

The review by Sammons *et.al.* (1995a) for Ofsted focuses on the British context and identifies eleven factors which it is claimed apply to both primary and secondary schools. The authors point out that the great majority of the studies they have reviewed have focused exclusively on students' cognitive outcomes in areas such as reading, mathematics or public examination results and only a few

on social/affective outcomes. The factors identified therefore are those likely to be associated with the academically effective school.

Taylor and Ryan (2005) give a perspective which is framed by the specialist schools movement in the UK and claim that the following seven indicators may identify a good school:

- They perform well in exams, both on an absolute and a value added basis.
- A high proportion of pupils stay on in full-time education or training at age 16. For schools with post-16 provision this would include those progressing to the sixth form.
- For aged 11 to 18 schools, a high proportion of their pupils go on to university or other post-secondary education as well as achieving good A level results.
- They have few permanently excluded children indicating high standards of order and discipline
- There is a low turnover of staff
- They have a large number of applications for places from parents.
- They make substantial provision for extra-curricular activities, including the arts, voluntary activities and other school activities.

(Taylor and Ryan, 2005: 2)

According to Hargreaves (2006:6), early beliefs that the influence of effective schools might be as large as family or community influences now appear misplaced. He claims that different researchers estimate the school effect at different levels but the majority of researchers claim between 8-18% of variation in student outcomes can be explained by school and classroom factors when we take into account the background of students. Many researchers identify the figures at the lower end of between 8-10 or 15%. Expressed as percentages school and classroom effects do not appear exceptionally large, but in terms of differences between schools in students' outcomes they can be highly significant both educationally and socially. In Britain this has been translated into more

easily recognised outcomes and the range could mean the difference between schools value added scores of between seven grade E or seven grade C results at GCSE (Mortimore, Sammons and Thomas (1994). There are strong suggestions that the size of primary school effects may be greater than those of secondary schools (Sammons et. al. 1995b).

The more people conceive of the effective school, rather than recognising a range of models of effectiveness, the more rapidly isomorphism will accelerate. It is assumed that the dominant criterion of school effectiveness – test performance – is the only and the right measure of effectiveness. In fact many school leaders and teachers would challenge this, arguing that the demands of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means that we must rethink what constitutes the effective and efficient school. (Hargreaves, 2006:6)

Research has also shown that early beliefs that school effects were distinct from teacher or classroom effects were misplaced since studies increasingly show the great majority of the variation between schools is in fact due to classroom variation. The unique variation due to the influence of the school shrinks to quite small levels. Consequently some have argued that more study should be devoted to the study of the effective classroom rather than to the effective school. Recent research has pointed to considerable variation in departmental effectiveness within the same school and to the importance of consideration of issues such as whether year group effectiveness could be another significant variable.

The *Schooling Issues Digest* issued by the Australian Government Dept of Education, Science and Training (2004) noted that studies in Australia have found that the key to improved educational outcomes for students is teacher effectiveness and that a given school is likely to be only as effective as the quality of classroom teaching within that school. The study reinforced the notion that teacher and classroom variables account for more of the variance in pupil achievement than school variables – ‘Learning takes place in classrooms through the interaction of students and their teachers’.

Research has indicated that we should remain sceptical over whether schools remain 'effective' or 'ineffective' over long periods of time (say five to seven

years). Nuttall et. al (1989) have shown that school performance can vary quite rapidly over two or three years. It used to be thought that the 'effective school' was so across a range of both academic and social outcomes. The study of Mortimore et. al. (1988) showed that academic effectiveness is not necessarily associated with social or 'affective' effectiveness. Furthermore the belief that effective schools are effective for all subgroups of pupils within them is no longer tenable as there is evidence of different school effects for children of different ethnic groups, ability ranges and socio-economic backgrounds within the same school.

Taylor and Ryan (2005:3) note that the success factors are not particularly surprising in themselves, but a key finding is the interconnectedness of qualities of excellence. In other words, the studies conclude that all the essential factors for a successful school must be implemented together in a coherent and joined up way.

Figure 1 – *Characteristics of School Effectiveness and Excellence – a Web of Relationships to Good to Great Principles* - aims to present a range of perspectives on school effectiveness and excellence and the conceptual links to the Collins model for *Good to Great*. Each thread in the web represents a thematic connection between *Good to Great* and the literature on school effectiveness. For ease of interpretation, the threads have been colour coded to match the colours allocated to the Key Concepts from the Collins study. The web is presented in order to avoid a 'list of lists' drawn from the literature on school effectiveness and is designed to demonstrate both the nature and density of connectivity between a range of perspectives on school effectiveness and excellence and the *Good to Great* principles.

## Characteristics of School Effectiveness and Excellence – a Web of Relationships to Good-to-Great Principles

- (a) strong leadership of the principal
- (b) emphasis on mastery of basic skills
- (c) a clean, orderly and secure school environment
- (d) high teacher expectations of pupil performance
- (e) frequent monitoring of students to assess their progress

- a good leadership team of the head teacher, heads of department and governing body;
- the ability to attract and retain good teachers;
- a focus on the basics such as literacy and numeracy;
- The setting of targets and the use of data to monitor progress; discipline and order.
- Curriculum innovation, which may include vocational awards, and/or the International Baccalaureate;
- Extensive use of information communications technology (ICT), including linked wireless laptops and white board;
- Consideration of a longer school day and non-traditional term dates;
- A focus on individual learning to create an ethos of achievement for all;
- The support of parents and the use of older students as mentors.

- Focus on teaching and learning
- Leadership
- The learning environment
- High expectations
- Positive reinforcement
- Monitoring performance
- Student rights and responsibilities
- The school as a place of learning
- Parental involvement

- Description of the school
- Overall effectiveness of the school
  - Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision
  - What the school should do to improve further
- Achievement and standards
  - Personal development and well-being
- Quality of provision
  - Teaching and learning
  - Curriculum and other activities
  - Care, guidance and support
- Leadership and management
- The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy
- The extent to which providers ensure that they stay safe
- The extent to which learners make a positive contribution

**Level 5 Leadership** – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

**First Who...Then What** – Good-to-great leaders first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, the right people in the right seats – and then they figured out where to drive it.

**Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)** – unwavering faith that one can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties and at the same time to have the discipline to confront the brutal facts of the current reality, whatever they might be.

**The Hedgehog Concept** – to focus on the core business, and to make that core business something you can be the best at.

**A Culture of Discipline** – No need for excessive controls – disciplined people with disciplined thought with an ethic of entrepreneurship to create great performance.

**Technology Accelerators** – the companies studied did not use technology as the primary means of igniting transformation, although they were pioneers of carefully selected technologies to support other strategies.

**The Flywheel and the Doom Loop** – The Good-to-Great transformation never happened in one fell swoop – rather the process resembled relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, and building up momentum until and beyond a point of breakthrough. This was contrasted with successive short term transformation programmes which could send a company into a 'doom loop'.

- A clear and well articulated mission focused on high quality learning for all students.
- Substantial organized time for instruction that is authentic, demanding, and coordinated across units and schools.
- Opportunities for teachers and administrators to grow and develop skills and knowledge through professional training, collegial dialogue and discussion, and schoolwide problem solving and planning.
- High expectations for students and staff, with the belief everyone can achieve.
- School instructional leadership—from principals and teachers—that encourages, supports, and facilitates innovation, high standards, and learning.
- The existence of both commitment and opportunities for parents to be significant partners in the education of their children through school activities, meaningful communication, and involvement in decisions about the school.
- Adequate support, resources, and autonomy to make decisions and implement programs in the best interest of students.
- A school culture characterized by mutual respect, collegial sharing, and high standards that are reinforced and underscored in school traditions, espoused values, and recognition ceremonies—these are schools where people care about each other, work hard together, and celebrate finding ways to improve what they do.

1. values, vision and story telling - doing the right things
2. language maketh the school
3. creating an environment for learning
4. doing things right
5. singing from the same song sheet - a question of judgement
6. developing all staff
7. teaching, learning and assessment - policies and practices
8. using data - bringing utopia closer
9. understanding complex change
10. the example of the leader - what I say, what I do and who I am match

**1. Professional leadership** - Three characteristics have been found to be associated with successful leadership:

**Firm and purposeful** - strength of purpose, involving proactive management, an emphasis upon recruitment of people who 'fit' the school and the generation of consistency and purpose within the school's management team

**A participative approach** - sharing of leadership positions and the involvement of teachers in school management and curriculum planning and to consultation with teachers about spending and other policy decisions

**The leading professional** - the head teacher's role as the 'leading professional' implying involvement in and knowledge about what goes on in the classroom, including the curriculum, teaching strategies and the monitoring of pupil progress.

**2. Shared vision and goals** - Schools are clearly more effective when staff build consensus on the aims and values of the school and where they put this into practice through consistent and collaborative ways of working. This is seen in:

**Unity of purpose** - involving a consensus on values

**Consistency of practice** - in which adopting a particular approach to school curriculum guidelines and to discipline has a positive impact on the progress of pupils

**Collegiality and collaboration**

**3. A learning environment** - The ethos of a school is partly determined by the vision, values and goals of the staff and also by the climate in which pupils work. Two key aspects of this latter factor are:

**An orderly atmosphere**

**An attractive working environment**

**4. Concentration on teaching and learning** - This is generated by: **Maximisation of learning time** - This includes the proportion of the day given to academic subjects, the proportion of time given in lessons devoted to learning or to interaction with pupils, the proportion of time spent on work matters rather than on administrative/maintenance activities and the existence of well managed lesson transitions

**Academic emphasis** - the entry of a high proportion of the pupils in public examinations and senior staff checking that homework had been done.

**Focus on achievement**

**5. Purposeful teaching**

**Efficient organisation** - preparing lessons in advance

**Clarity of purpose**

**Structured lessons**

**Adaptive practice** - a well defined framework within which a degree of pupil independence and responsibility for managing their own learning can be encouraged

**6. High expectations**

**High expectations all round** - this involves the teachers taking a more active role in helping pupils

**Communicating expectations** - the communication and reinforcement of expectations

**Providing intellectual challenge**

**7. Positive reinforcement**

**Clear and fair discipline**

**Feedback** - direct and positive feedback such as praise and appreciation

**8. Monitoring progress** - Well established mechanisms for monitoring the performance and progress of pupils, classes, the school as a whole and the efficacy of improvement programmes

**Monitoring pupil performance** - for example, sound record keeping

**Evaluating school performance** - as in the notions of programme evaluation within models of cyclical school improvement

**9. Pupils rights and responsibilities**

**Raising pupil self esteem** - good staff/pupil relations and shared out of school activities between teachers and pupils

**Positions of responsibility** - the positive effects of having high proportions of pupils with positions of responsibility within the school, thus conveying trust in pupils and setting standards of mature behaviour

Control of work

**10. Home-school partnership**

**Parental involvement in their children's learning**

**11. A learning organisation**

**School based staff development**



It was felt important to explore the nature of the relationship between literature on school effectiveness and excellence and the *Good to Great* principles from a range of perspectives. Those presented represent views from the UK, US, and Australia and include those derived from research [(Sammons et al, 1995), (Taylor and Ryan, 2005)]; from process [(Ofsted Framework, 2005), Australian Education Department, Schooling Issues Digest, 2004)]; and from reflections of an eminent educationalist [Brighthouse]. Sources for the Web of Relationships may be identified by the colour of the border and the key is shown in Figure 2.

Each of the seven Key Concepts from Collins' *Good to Great* model are now explored in relation to the wider literature and particularly that which refers to the educational context and the effectiveness of schools. At the end of each section there is a summary of the main features in order to highlight those aspects which may be appropriate foci for the research activity to follow.

## Web of Relationships – Key to sources

Adapted from: Sammons, P., Hillman, J., and Mortimore, P. (1995) *Key Characteristics of Effective Schools a Review of School Effectiveness Research A report by the Institute of Education for the Office for Standards in Education* p.8 and

Reynolds, D. et. al. (1996) *School Effectiveness and School Improvement in the United Kingdom, School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 7,2,133-158

Based upon two studies from NFER, Taylor and Ryan (2005) name a number of common characteristics in high performing schools as *Qualities of Excellence*.

Taylor, C. and Ryan, C, 2005: *Excellence in Education: the making of great schools*, London: David Fulton

## Collins (2005) Good to Great

Tim Brighthouse, (2006) *The jigsaw of a successful school*

Edmonds, R.R. (1979) 'Effective schools for the urban poor' *Educational Leadership* 37,1, 20-24

The Australian Government Dept of Education, Science and Training (2004) issued a *Schooling Issues Digest* which identifies the characteristics of effective schools.

The Framework for the Inspection of Schools in England and Wales. Inspectors presently report on.

Peterson, K.D. (1997) *Characteristics of More Successful Schools, Reform Talk*, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Issue Number 3, July, 1997

## *Level 5 Leadership*

Jim Collins admits to being surprised – even shocked to discover that the type of leadership required for turning a good company into a great one was not one of high profile, big personality ‘celebrity’ leaders but ‘a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.’ (Collins, 2001:12). Collins calls this ‘Level 5 Leadership’ because this is the highest level in a hierarchy of executive capabilities identified in the ‘Good to Great’ research.

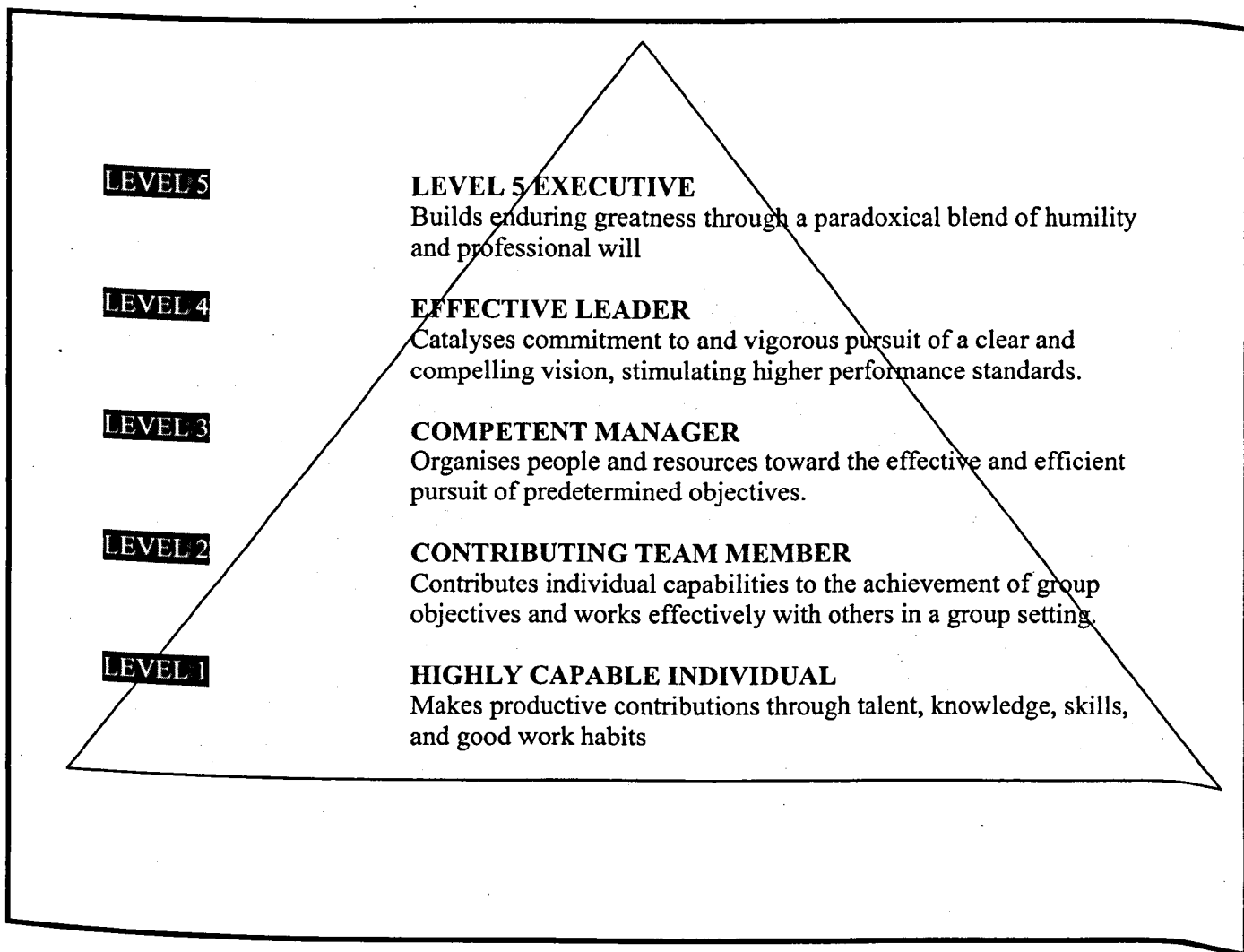


Figure 3 Level 5 Hierarchy (Collins, 2001:20)

This contradiction between personal humility and professional will finds some support in the recent literature on educational leadership. Sergiovanni, in describing a cognitive approach to leadership claims that humility is a virtue in today's complex world of leadership:

Leadership in today's schools requires a healthy dose of reflection on one's practice that comes from more humble, slow, low-keyed incremental approaches. Humble leaders are not afraid of trial and error, providing it is focused rather than random. (Sergiovanni, 2003: 23)

In his recent reflections on leadership, Bennis (2000) includes a part entitled 'The End of Leadership'. Although Bennis calls for an end to leadership, he proceeds to reframe leadership by defining the qualities of the 'New Leader' (2000:153 - 7):

- The New Leader understands and practices the power of appreciation.
- The New Leader is a connoisseur of talent, more curator than creator.
- The New Leader keeps reminding people of what is important.
- The New Leader generates and sustains trust.
- The New Leader, and the led are intimate allies.

The notion of sustainability in an organisation is also taken up by Collins – His study found that in ten out of eleven of the 'Good to Great' companies, the Chief Executives came from inside the company, whilst the comparison companies turned to outsiders with six times greater frequency and yet they failed to produce sustained great results. (Collins:2001:32)

Fink and Hargreaves (2006:12), in their work on sustainable leadership describe the syndrome of charismatic leaders who 'may lift their schools to impressive heights', but whose 'shoes are usually too big for successors to fill'. They also highlight the problem of school leaders ground down by the treadmill of trying to deliver higher and higher standards or burnt out by pouring every ounce of effort and emotional energy and every spare minute of their time into making their

school a success. The answer, Fink and Hargreaves argue, is to borrow from the environmental movement and learn from the principles and practices of the most successful and enduring private sector companies and develop the idea of sustainable leadership. They propose that we should strive for an education system that uses resources – policy levers, funding and people – in a way that produces enduring improvement in attainment through supporting the current generation of school leaders and growing the next.

Collins makes the point that Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty but that is equally about a ‘ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great.’ (Collins, 2001:30)

Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It's not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves (Collins, 2001:21). This level of resolve is also beneficial in the educational context.

Power and politics will continue to provide the context and daily realities of a life in our schools. It is the management of the tensions and dilemmas created by these that, within a strong values framework, is distinguishing feature of effective leaders whose persistent focus is upon the betterment of the young people and staff who worked in their schools and who themselves remain, often against all the odds, enthusiastic and committed to learning. (Day, 2003:202)

While successful head teachers have many different leadership styles, an NfER study (Rudd et al, 2002) found that the group of 20 head teachers they studied all shared certain characteristics:

- They all believed that they understood how to improve their own schools: ‘You've got to believe in yourself to start with.’

- They were very focused on their goals and committed to bringing about success in their schools;
- Many were unconventional and prepared to take risks in trying new ways to encourage learning;
- They were seen as being approachable, enabling new ideas, generated by management teams and teachers, to be taken on board;
- They were entrepreneurial, especially in finding sources of extra funding, and in taking new opportunities, such as bidding for specialist status.

The NFER study determined that whatever their leadership style, the vision of the head teacher was the most crucial factor in the school's success.

The determined nature of Level 5 leaders, Collins found (2001:33) was not just demonstrated in grand ideas and decisions but also in 'a personal style of sheer workmanlike diligence'.

In *Exhilarating Leadership* by Caldwell (2006:39), a number of workshops of school leaders revealed aspects of their work, which were exhilarating. The theme which was mentioned the greatest number of times, was that of success - achieving success with a particular project; successfully solving a problem or meeting a challenge; realizing a vision; preparing a curriculum; winning grants and other resources for the school; absence of complaints. Similarly, the next highest ranking theme was staff - working with staff; observing staff as they address issues or adopt new practices; mentoring staff including beginning teachers; school-based research and development; dreaming together; having fun together. This was followed closely by the theme of students - experiencing and celebrating the accomplishments of students, especially when needs are met; engaging with students.

Work which was the antithesis of exhilarating, that is boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting was also noted. The highest ranking theme on this scale was the performance of staff - staff not making an effort; resist change; blockers; use outdated pedagogy; make complaints. This theme was followed

closely by that all of administrative work -filling in forms, reports or surveys, e-mail, including those required for legal purposes; preparing timetables; long unnecessary meetings; governments issues; online recruiting procedures. Another popular theme in this ranking was lack of support from different levels of the system; poor understanding at high levels of nature of schooling; unfairness or inadequacy in allocating resources to school; complexity and hierarchy or bureaucracy; lack of feedback. This work by Caldwell gives some indication of 'workmanlike diligence' required by school leaders.

The qualities of a Level 5 leader are reinforced by the attitude and actions of that leader and Collins illustrates this idea using a window and a mirror:

Level 5 leaders look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well (and if they cannot find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck). At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly. (Collins, 2001:35)

This concept becomes even more important when we move away from the business sector. In his work on the application of *Good to Great* principles to the social sectors, Collins (2005:11) recognises a distinction between *executive* leadership, as found in many commercial settings and, what he describes as *legislative* leadership which reflects the complex governance and diffuse power structures common in non-business organisations:

In executive leadership, the individual leader has enough concentrated power to simply make the right decisions. In legislative leadership, on the other hand, no individual leader – not even the nominal chief executive – has enough structural power to make the most important decisions by himself or herself. Legislative leadership relies more upon persuasion, political currency and shared interests to create the right conditions for the right decisions to happen.

This idea is supported widely in the field of educational leadership. Davies in his introduction to *The Essentials of School Leadership* (2005) describes leadership

as: 'not the provenance of one individual but a group of people who provide leadership in the school and, by doing so, provide support and inspiration to others to achieve the best for the children in their care.'

In the Journal of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, (November 2005:3) Andy Vicars, the head of the Birley Community College in Sheffield has written an article about distributed leadership. He claims that by sharing leadership across the school:

'We have helped to raise the skills, self-esteem and commitment of a group of staff, who are increasingly central to the effectiveness...Good leadership can be driven by an inspiring individual. But that alone is not enough: it also requires teamwork.'

Harris (2003:49), in writing about the new orthodoxy of teacher leadership claims that it is unlikely that schools will become learning communities by clinging to singular, individual approaches to school leadership.

West-Burnham (2003:51), in exploring the concept of learning to lead offers these foundation principles.

- Learning is a unique, individual and subjective process;
- Leadership is a distinctive, high order activity, which provides the context and direction for management;
- Leadership is a composite of knowledge, skills, experience and personal qualities in varying ratios according to time, place and personality;
- Leadership is understood through relationships, not status.

The importance of relationships rather than status in managing the complexity of legislative leadership is also recognised by Novak in *Inviting Educational Leadership* (2002:31), who shows how it is important to 'invite others professionally', and how it is important for leaders to use their personalities, relationships, knowledge, organizational experiences and social commitments to cordially and creatively summon human potential.



Collins (2005:11) appreciates that it is precisely this legislative dynamic that makes Level 5 leadership particularly important to the social sectors. He recognizes that governance structures often have more components and inherent ambiguity in the social sectors and that true leadership is more prevalent (as opposed to the exercise of power) which he defines as 'getting people to follow when they have the freedom not to'. (Collins, 2005:32)

Lambert (2003:14), reflecting on shifting conceptions of educational leadership, asks what can we safely say about leadership at this point in our history based on what we know now:

- The concept of leadership is in transition, yet there is a convergence of meaning around the characteristics of effective leaders and the cultural embeddedness of the notion.
- Leadership that is culturally embedded in the school's or organization's community is directly related to student learning, high productivity and high leadership capacity.
- Leadership is spiritually purposeful - it must be the value-driven in order to accomplish purposeful learning among participants.
- The process of leadership must provoke us to new actions - to challenge old assumptions about who can learn, how, and why. Such provocation is initiated through inquiry, reflection, dialogue and a focus on results.
- Leadership is an open agenda, inviting thoughtful responses and redefinitions. The work is not done; the book is not closed.

Fromm, Hentschke, and Kern (2003: 302) note that the increased sophistication of the education leaders will be defined as understanding of the 'business model' as well as the 'education model' of any organization or program, and that whilst educational leadership remains a valued paradigm, its component parts increasingly include those of educational entrepreneur.

Level 5 leadership is a clarification of a particular type of leadership – a type which has been found empirically to be present by Collins in a business model,

when a company has gone from 'Good to Great'. The main features found in *Level 5 leaders* are:

- A paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will
- Ambition – but for the organisation not themselves
- The setting up of successors for greater success
- Resolution to do whatever it takes to make the company great
- A workmanlike diligence
- Looking out of the window to attribute success and in the mirror to accept responsibility
- Legislative leadership – getting people to follow when they have the freedom not to.

### *First Who...Then What*

Perhaps the part of Collins' research I have heard most often quoted is about 'getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus and the right people into the key seats'. But I think that sometimes the speakers may have missed the main point of this key concept from Good to Great. It is not just about assembling the right team, but in order to build a great organisation, Collins found that this should happen before you decide where to drive the bus. Collins (2001:42) argues that if you decide where to go first and people join the bus because of where it is going, you may have a problem ten miles down the road when you need to change direction. If, however, you have the right people on board, they are likely to be self-motivated by an inner drive to create something great and a change of direction in order to create greatness will not matter. If the bus contains the wrong people, he claims, it does not matter if you discover the right direction; you still will not have a great company because he found that great vision without great people is irrelevant.

Leaders can allow themselves to be 'uncertain' because this attitude is also 'inspiring, expectant .... and perhaps... joyful about confronting the unknown'. (Senge, 1999:10)

Evidence can be found in educational research to also reflect the primacy of people and their relationships. Bentley in *Learning beyond the Classroom* states that:

The stuff which binds resources together and shapes them into cultures of learning and achievement is the web of human relationships created by people who contribute their time, effort, and expertise. These relationships cross between places and institutions, as well as developing within them. Effective efforts to tackle underachievement and reduce the risks of failure rest, therefore, on the creation of new, positive learning relationships. (Bentley, 1998:91)

Greenfield (1986:166) allows us to make a useful distinction between values and vision – people are attracted to the bus not because of where it is going but because they share the same values as the other passengers: ‘organizations are built on the unification of people around the values.’

Collins (2001:47) distinguishes the type of team assembled by the type of leader present. He found that in the *Good to Great* companies, a Level 5 leader was likely to first (who) build a superior executive team and then (what), with the right people in place, decide on the best path to greatness. The comparison companies often had a model which Collins called a ‘genius with a thousand helpers’ – typically a Level 4 leader (an effective leader who catalyses commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards) who first (what) sets a vision for where to drive the bus and develops a road map for getting there and then (who) enlists a crew of highly capable ‘helpers’ to make the vision happen. This second model would be successful for the time that the leader stayed with the company but it was not sustainable when that leader left as the right people and the right talents had not been developed in the meantime. *Good to Great* management teams consist of people who debate vigorously in search of the best answers, yet who unify behind decisions, regardless of parochial interests.

In Collins' work (2005:15) on the social sectors, he recognises the constraints on non-commercial organisations. Business executives can more easily fire people and they can use money to buy talent. In British schools we have a national pay scale and strong unions that protect both mediocre teachers and the excellent alike. Capability procedures, invoked for a lack of competence, are long and drawn out affairs.

Adair writing on effective teambuilding in an educational setting, (Crawford, Kydd, and Riches, 1997:180) recognizes that the importance of choosing the right people as team members from the collection of possible members is the first principle of team success. He also acknowledges that there are degrees of choice. There are constraints on the pool of people from whom the choice must be made, as well as constraints of time.

Getting the right people on the bus may feel more difficult because one school can only pay a similar salary to another school, but Collins (2001:49) was surprised to find that the level of executive compensation, including both salary and incentives did not distinguish *Good to Great* from comparator companies. Getting the wrong people off the bus may well be more difficult in a school setting but Collins (2001:53) notes the necessity to be rigorous in human resource processes, from selection to team and task allocation. He distinguishes this quality from ruthlessness by listing three practical disciplines:

- When in doubt, don't hire – keep looking.
- When you know you need to make a people change, act.
- Put your best people on your biggest opportunities, not your biggest problems

There is 'one giant advantage' which Collins (2005:32) claims for the social sector in that organisations can more easily tap into the idealistic passions of those who seek 'nobility of service and meaning beyond money'. He asserts that people are not the most important asset, but that the right people are, and whether

someone is the right person has more to do with character traits and innate capabilities than with specific knowledge, background, or skills. (2001:64)

Friedman in *The World is Flat* (2005:305) records the observation of a Maryland State High School Principal:

What she looked for in hiring teachers was one simple thing: 'whether they loved kids.' Because if you don't connect with the kids you'll never be able to convey the material, she said. If you can't feel the music, you'll never be able to play the music. 'But if you love kids,' she said, 'and you convey that, even if you don't know that much about the subject you're teaching, they will be inspired by you and they will go out and learn it themselves. I can teach anyone a strategy, but I can't teach a person to love kids.

Caldwell recognises the importance of selecting the right people in defining principles of resource allocation for schools in the twenty-first century:

Quality of teaching is the most important resource of all, and school systems... should place the highest priority on attracting, preparing, pacing, rewarding and retaining the best people for service in the profession. (Caldwell, 2006:47)

The main features of the Key Concept *First Who ... Then What* are:

- Good to Great leaders begin the transformation by first getting the right people on the bus, the right people in the key seats and the wrong people off the bus and then worked out where to drive it.
- It is not just about assembling the right team but that 'who' decisions come before 'what' decisions.
- Human resource decisions from selection to deployment are made with great rigour and involve three practical disciplines:
  - ⇒ When in doubt, don't hire – keep looking.

- ⇒ When you know you need to make a people change, act.
- ⇒ Put your best people on your biggest opportunities, not your biggest problems

### *Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)*

One of the dominant themes which arose from the Collins research (2001:69) was that, not surprisingly, breakthrough results came about by a series of good decisions, diligently executed and accumulated one on top of another. The *Good to Great* companies, it was found did not have a perfect track record, but, on the whole, they made many more good decisions than bad ones, and they made many more good decisions than the comparison companies. The research found that this was not just a matter of luck but the distinctive nature of the process in the successful companies. These companies made an honest effort to fully determine and understand the truth of their situation. 'You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts. The Good to Great companies operated in accordance with this principle, and the comparison companies generally did not.' (Collins, 2001:70). The very language used by Collins indicates that this is not always an easy option – a vision is set out but grounded in the reality of where the organisation finds itself at that time and the courageous decisions made.

Peter Berry, NCSL's Director of Marketing and Communications (in an article in NCSL Ldr Magazine, November 2005:31) recognizes that: 'Courage is one of the most important qualities needed by heads ...they need the courage to tackle what is uncomfortable, think new ideas, and take risks.'

Similarly, David Bell, the then HM Chief Inspector of schools, (in the same article) appreciates the need for resilience which 'will see you through the good times and bad' and 'which is cultivated over time by learning lessons from your life and career'

“The original meaning of authority”, Capra (2002:18) has noted, “is not ‘power to command’ but a ‘firm basis for knowing and acting’”.

The Level 5 leader is one who acknowledges that their perspective on the situation and circumstances which surround a company is not the only valid view and therefore, in order to confront the brutal facts, these leaders had the courage to create a climate in which the truth could be heard. Collins (2001:74) offers four basic practices to promote such a climate:

1. Lead with questions, not answers – leading from Good to Great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights.
2. Engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion – All the Good to Great companies had a penchant for intense dialogue. Phrases like ‘loud debate,’ ‘heated discussions,’ and ‘healthy conflict’ peppered the articles and interview transcripts from all the companies. They didn’t use discussion as a sham process to let people ‘have their say’ so that they could ‘buy in’ to a predetermined decision. The process was more like a heated scientific debate, with people engaged in a search for the best answers.
3. Conduct autopsies, without blame – if you do this – you go a long way toward creating a climate where the truth is heard. If you have the right people on the bus, you should almost never need to assign blame but need only to search for understanding and learning.
4. Build ‘red flag’ mechanisms – this is about identifying information that cannot be ignored. No evidence was found that the Good to Great companies had more or better evidence than the comparison companies. Both sets of companies had virtually identical access to good information. The key, then lies not in better information, but in turning information into information that cannot be ignored.

West-Burnham (2003:58) makes a case for the following principles, which are essential for leadership development, to become implicit in personal working patterns:

- Building review into meetings and all individual and team projects;
- Scheduling time and space for regular reflection;
- Establishing a structured and regular pattern of professional reading and creating opportunities to discuss and apply insights gained;
- Regular meetings with a coach and/or mentor as part of a sustained (and sustaining), developmental relationship;
- Acting as a coach/mentor to others;
- Creating networks (virtual and actual) to nourish support and challenge.

In *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Heifetz (1994:6) argues that leaders do not try to impose change. Instead they make the case for why change is necessary, and then make the space for it to occur.

For some of the *Good to Great* companies, facing the brutal facts meant dealing with considerable adversity on their road to greatness. In each case they maintained an unwavering faith in the endgame, and a commitment to prevail as a great company despite the brutal facts. Collins (2001:83) called this the Stockdale Paradox – so named because the idea came from a conversation he had had with Admiral Jim Stockdale, co-author (with his wife) of *In Love and War*. Stockdale was the highest ranking US military officer in the Hanoi prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. He was tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 to 1973. He lived out the war with no prisoner's rights, no set release date, and no certainty that he would ever see his family again. He also shouldered the burden of command of his fellow prisoners. He told Collins that he kept going because never lost faith in the end of the story – he never doubted not only that he would get out, but also that he would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of his life, which 'he would not trade'. Those who didn't make it, he described as 'optimists' who would say they would be out by Christmas, which came and



went, and then out by Easter, which again, came and went. He said that they died of a 'broken heart'.

The point of the story is that the successful companies were able to retain faith that they would prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, whilst, at the same time, confronting the most brutal facts of their current reality, whatever they may have been. (Collins, 2001:86)

Caldwell in *Exhilarating Leadership* (2006:20) writes about Jan Shrimpton, a principal in Melbourne, Australia who transformed a failing school. The dominant themes were optimism, personal modelling, a focus on all children experiencing success, open communication, and attending to the needs, interests and concerns of staff and the community.

In considering the application of the *Good to Great* principles to the social sectors, Collins (2005:32) identifies behaviours which may create barriers to applying concept. Often a culture of 'niceness' pervades a non-profit organisation – perhaps because of its ideals – perhaps because of the greater difficulties in dealing with people. This 'niceness' can inhibit candour about the brutal facts.

Most social sector institutions operate within bigger organisations and systems and Collins has found a tendency for workers in these organisations to state that they cannot progress to greatness unless the system changes.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983:148) state: 'the greater the extent to which the organisations in a field transact with agencies of the state, the greater the extent of isomorphism'.

Collins recognises the constraints of these systemic factors but claims that it is possible to build 'pockets of greatness' – which can be found in nearly every difficult environment. There is a need to retain the faith that you can prevail in the end despite the shortcomings of the system – there is no point waiting for the system to be fixed.

The main features of the Key Concept *Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)* are:

- Good to Great companies began the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality.
- In starting with an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of the situation, the right decisions often become self-evident.
- Good to Great companies created a culture where the truth could be heard through four basic practices:
  - ⇒ Lead with questions, not answers
  - ⇒ Engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion
  - ⇒ Conduct autopsies, without blame
  - ⇒ Build 'red flag' mechanisms
- Good to Great companies faced as much adversity as comparison companies but hit the realities of the situation head-on in order to emerge from adversity even stronger.
- The Stockdale Paradox invites us to retain faith that we will prevail in the end whilst facing the most brutal facts of our current reality.
- In the social sector – we should not let 'niceness' prevent us from confronting the brutal facts or let the faults of the system prevent us from creating a pocket of greatness.

### *The Hedgehog Concept*

The curiously named 'Hedgehog Concept' coined by Collins (2001:90) arises from an ancient Greek parable. The fox is known as a cunning creature who is able to devise a variety of complex plans to sneak up and attack the hedgehog. Daily the fox 'cases' the hedgehog's den, devising plans and waiting for the perfect opportunity. One day the hedgehog is out looking for food and the fox is cleverly waiting at a junction in the trail. As the fox swiftly leaps out at the hedgehog, the hedgehog sensing danger rolls up into a little ball, with its sharp

quills defending it in every direction. The fox has no choice but to retreat and work on another cunning plan. A similar encounter happens daily with a new and ingenious attack but the same defence mechanism. The fox is swift, cunning, and handsome in its red coat and fine tail, whilst the hedgehog is small, odd looking and relatively clumsy, and yet the hedgehog always wins.

Collins acknowledges Isaiah Berlin, who, in his 1993 essay 'The Hedgehog and the Fox' extrapolated from this parable to divide people into the two groups: hedgehogs and foxes. Foxes pursue many ends at the same time and see the world in all its complexity. They are 'scattered or diffused, moving on many levels' according to Berlin, never integrating their thinking into one overall concept or vision. Hedgehogs, on the other hand, simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything. For Collins (2001:91) it doesn't matter how complex the world, a hedgehog reduces all challenges and dilemmas to simple - indeed almost simplistic - hedgehog ideas. For a hedgehog, anything that does not somehow relate to the hedgehog idea holds no relevance.

Collins and his team found through his comparative research methodology that: those who built the *Good to Great* companies were, to one degree or another, hedgehogs. They used their hedgehog nature to drive toward what we came to call the Hedgehog Concept for their companies. Those who led the comparison companies tended to be foxes, never gaining the clarifying advantage of a Hedgehog Concept, being instead scattered, diffused, and inconsistent. (Collins, 2001:92).

Out of clutter, find simplicity.

From discord, find harmony.

In the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity.

(Einstein, 1934:36)

Caldwell in *Exhilarating Leadership* (2006:22) quotes the principal John Fleming, who transformed his school in Melbourne Australia through a 'hedgehog-like' approach.

The core business of the school is student achievement. That's it. Everything revolves around that. We should be measured against student achievement. I should be measured against, student achievement, so should every classroom teacher. It is all very well to have happy kids in your school, but if they are not achieving academically then I think there is a real issue. That is our core business.

Collins (2005:94) records a discussion with his team of researchers about the nature of strategy. They recognised that both the *Good to Great* companies and the comparison companies had all invested time and energy in strategic planning and that a value judgement about good or bad strategy was not appropriate. It was about the simplicity of the idea and its relationship to the core purpose of the company.

The importance of the relationship between core purpose and strategy is a view which resonates with a study of strategically-focused schools in the UK by Davies, Davies and Ellison (2005:7):

The most common view of strategy is that it involves setting the direction for the school. It is the process of providing a coherent way of translating the core moral purpose of the school and its values into action, influenced by a futures perspective and vision. It is vital that the school establishes the strategic context through a clear articulation of its core moral purposes and values as strategy is a delivery vehicle that can effectively translate those values; in itself strategy only takes on the values of the context within which it is operating. The core purpose and values are precursors to establishing the future perspective and vision for the school. Poor strategies often emerge because of lack of clarification of core purpose, values and vision.

Collins chose not to focus on whether the quality of strategy observed was good or bad, he focused rather on the outcomes of strategy and why it took some

companies from *Good to Great* and others not. This perspective is also reflected in the study of British schools:

It is important to remember that strategy is a neutral delivery vehicle. If you have a poor vision and a dubious moral purpose then a good strategic process and approach may effectively deliver it for you. The significance of this is that strategy does not exist in a vacuum; it needs to be part of a wider process of values-led leadership and futures visioning.

(Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005:8)

The Hedgehog Concept is not just a random simple idea, but, as Collins (2001:95) describes, 'a simple crystalline concept that flows from deep understanding about the intersection of the following three circles':

1. *What you can be the best in the world at* (not simply a core competence)
2. *What drives your economic engine* (Good to Great companies effectively generated sustained cash flow and profitability)
3. *What you are deeply passionate about* (a focus on those activities which ignited their passion)

The second of these three circles may be the most problematic to relate to research in education. In his initial work – Collins (2001:96) 'nods' to the non-business sector by recognising that in the economic engine the single denominator for commercial organisations would be 'profit per x as opposed to cash flow per x in the social sector'. He revisits this in his work on the social sectors (Collins, 2005:19) and recognises that the same idea does not translate easily to non-profit organisations, as the social sectors do not have rational capital markets that channel resources to those who deliver the best results and there is no one underlying economic driver – the analogy of profit per x – that applies across all social sector organisations. Collins recognises that the whole purpose of the social sectors is to meet social objectives, human needs and national priorities that cannot be priced at a profit. Collins reinterprets and reorders the three circles for the social sector and identifies a key difference:

The third circle of the Hedgehog Concept shifts from being an 'economic engine' to a 'resource engine'. The critical question is not 'How much money do we make?' but 'How can we develop a sustainable resource engine to deliver superior performance relative to our mission?'

(Collins 2005:18)

This broadened definition takes into account the value of the process and as such has support in the business literature. In his book, *Competitive Advantage*, (1985: 36) Michael Porter writes of the importance of the Value Chain.

Every firm is a collection of activities that are performed to design, produce, market, deliver, and support its product. All these activities can be represented using a value chain. A firm's value chain and the way it performs individual activities are a reflection of its history, its strategy, its approach to implementing its strategy, and the underlying economics of the activities themselves.

Collins' circles refashioned become (Collins, 2005:19):

Circle 1: Passion – Understanding what your organisation stands for (its core values) and why it exists (its mission or core purpose)

Circle 2: Best at – Understanding what your organisation can uniquely contribute to the people it touches, better than any other organisation on the planet.

Circle 3: Resource Engine – Understanding what best drives your resource engine, broken into three parts: time money, and brand

This revised framework does make it easier to relate to the world of education. Day (2003:189), in describing what successful leadership in schools looks like, recognized that:

The principals communicated their vision and values through their leadership relationships. They raised self-confidence, morale and sense of achievement of staff, by using these relationships to develop a climate of collaboration, and by applying within them high standards to themselves and others. Their focus was always upon the betterment of the children.

The need for hedgehogs to dispense with ideas or initiatives which detract from the core purpose is also recognised:

What seemed to make the difference for the stakeholders was not only the persistence of vision and values with the simultaneous focus of the principals upon process and achievement (product), but also the principal's ability to manage a number of tensions and dilemmas that characterized the human imperfections in school contexts, which, like classrooms, were by their nature, dynamic, complex and unpredictable. (Day, 2003:190)

The importance of passion as a central focus is also supported in educational research. In June of 2004, the Minister for School Standards, David Milliband, commissioned a report to consider the issues of learning, the project was managed by Demos and the chairman was David Hargreaves. The authors claim that there are schools and colleges across the country that demonstrate effective practice in learning and learning to learn. In the experience of the authors, they shared a number of key features: 'A passion for learning is central to their work; teachers and learners have a shared and agreed understanding of what effective learning is. Learning infuses the organization and directs its improvement agenda. All aspects of life in school or college are underpinned by the question. 'How will this impact on learning in this place?'" (Demos, 2005:16)

The resource engine across the range of social sector organisations, according to Collins (2005:18) has three basic components: time, money and brand. Time refers to how well you attract people willing to contribute their efforts for free, or at rates below what their talents would yield in business. Money refers to sustained cash flow. Brand refers to how well your organisation can cultivate a deep well of emotional goodwill and mind-share of potential supporters. The first of these seems to have least relevance to schools in England where teachers are paid a decent wage on a national scale – although the extra curricular work – often done as an unpaid part of the job – is an area which can really add value to the education of the children in our schools. The components of brand and money are very much related due to the influence of parental preference in the

UK and the fact money follows the student in the system. If the brand is not right and the wrong messages are received by a community about a school – it will become under-subscribed and the funding reduced accordingly.

Collins (2005:20) recognises a wide variation in economic structures in the social sectors but claims that this increases the importance of the hedgehog principle – the inherent complexity requires deeper, more penetrating insight and rigorous clarity than your average business entity. You begin with passion, then you refine passion with a rigorous assessment of what you can best contribute to the communities you touch. Then you create a way to tie in your resource engine directly to the two other circles. He goes on to claim (Ibid.:23) that those who have the discipline to attract and channel resources directed solely at their Hedgehog Concept, and to reject resources that drive them away from the centre of their three circles, will be of greater service to the world.

The main features of *the Hedgehog Concept* are:

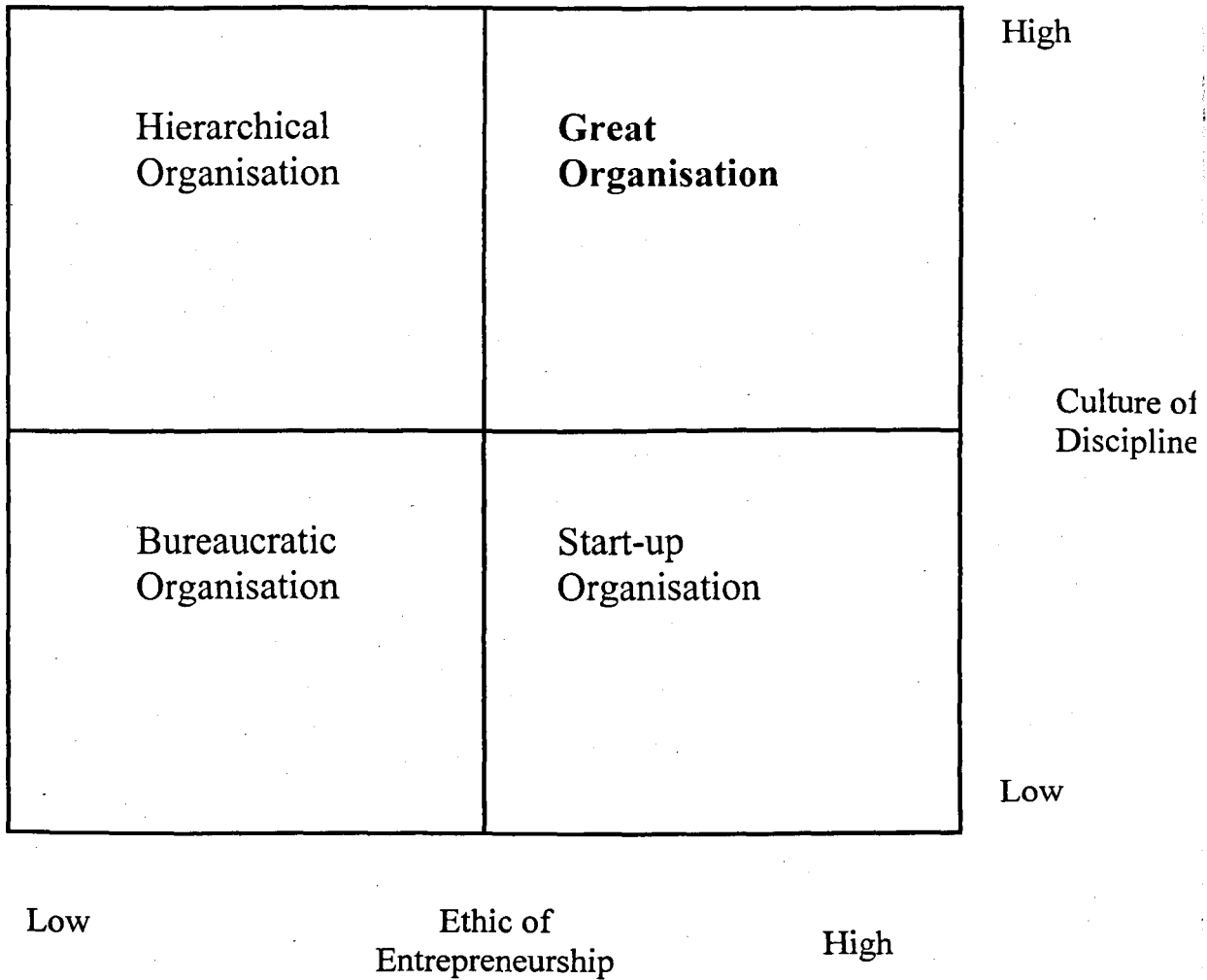
- A simple crystalline concept
- Strategy which focuses on a deep understanding of this core purpose and not bravado
- The intersection of the three circles:
  - ⇒ Passion
  - ⇒ Best at
  - ⇒ Resource Engine
- The elements of the resource engine:
  - ⇒ Time
  - ⇒ Money
  - ⇒ Brand



## *A Culture of Discipline*

The interdependence of the key concepts of Collins' work is becoming apparent, and never more so than when we examine the need for a 'Culture of Discipline'. In a sense, many of the outcomes are about creating a culture of discipline. For Collins (2001:126) it starts with disciplined people. The transition begins not by trying to discipline the wrong people into the right behaviours, but by getting self-disciplined people on the bus in the first place. Next comes disciplined thought. Disciplined thought is required to confront the brutal facts of reality, while retaining faith that you can and will create a path to greatness. Next comes disciplined action which is the basis for this key concept. The order was found to be important for the Good to Great companies as comparison companies often tried to jump straight to disciplined action. But, Collins claims, disciplined action without self-disciplined people is impossible to sustain, and disciplined action without disciplined thought is a recipe for disaster. The relationship between a culture of discipline and an ethic of entrepreneurship is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 - The Good to Great Matrix of Creative Discipline (Collins, 2001:122)



Collins (2001:123) admits that, by its nature, 'culture' is a somewhat unwieldy topic to discuss, the key concept relates directly to one central idea: 'Build a culture full of people who take disciplined action within the three circles, fanatically consistent with the Hedgehog Concept.'

He defines this more precisely through the following four aspects:

1. Build a culture around the idea of freedom and responsibility, within a framework.
2. Fill that culture with self-disciplined people who are willing to go to extreme lengths to fulfil their responsibilities.
3. Don't confuse a culture of discipline with a tyrannical disciplinarian.
4. Adhere with great consistency to the Hedgehog Concept, exercising an almost religious focus on the intersection of the three circles. Equally important, create a 'stop doing list' and systematically unplug anything extraneous.(Collins, 2001:124)

The idea of freedom and responsibility, within a framework is illustrated by Collins (2001:124) by a airplane pilot who works within a very strict system with clear constraints, and whilst she does not have the freedom to go outside of that system, the crucial decisions as to whether to land or take off or abort, rest with the pilot who has ultimate responsibility for the airplane and the lives of the people on board.

In education, we too have the responsibility for people's lives. Bennis and Nanus highlight the compelling nature of vision as part of a framework for engaging others:

'Their visions or intentions are compelling and pull people towards them. Intensity coupled with commitment is magnetic... [Leaders] do not have to coerce people to pay attention; they are so intent on what they are doing, like a child completely absorbed in creating a sand castle, they draw others in. Vision grabs.' (Bennis and Nanus 1985:28)

Carey and Frohnen (1998:1-2) explain the nature of a community which shares a common framework:

A true community, one that lives up to its name, is one in which members share something in common - something important enough to give rise to fellowship or friendship, and to sustain it. There may be many kinds of communities with varying ends or goals. But each must form around characteristics, experiences, practices, and beliefs that are important enough to bind at the members up to one another, such that they are willing to sacrifice for one another as "fellows" or sharers of a common fate.

Hartle and Hobby (2003: 387) in an article which recognizes the changes for those who work in the learning community, contend that there is strong evidence linking school climate, not only to standards of academic achievement, but also to broader measures of success like teacher retention. Recent investigations also suggest that school leaders can actually change the climate for the better in their schools and can change it relatively quickly.

The Collins research (2001:127) recognised that people in the *Good to Great* companies became somewhat extreme in the fulfilment of their responsibilities and the frequent use of words such as: 'disciplined, rigorous, dogged, determined, diligent, precise, fastidious, systematic, methodical, workmanlike, demanding, consistent, focused and accountable' was striking.

'Success can only occur in an environment where everyone is totally committed to a rigid set of core values - integrity, trust, quality and boundaryless behaviour.' (Sieger, 2005)

Caldwell and Spinks in *Leading the Self-Managing School* (1992:55), acknowledged the importance of empowerment in establishing a culture of discipline:

'Providing people with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in decisions is an important aspect of empowerment, hence the likelihood that

the self-managing school would also be characterized by extensive school-based professional development programs.'

The distinction is made between a culture of discipline and a tyrannical disciplinarian – Collins (2001:130) makes the point that: 'Whereas the Good to Great companies had Level 5 leaders who built an enduring culture of discipline, the unsustained comparisons had Level 4 leaders who personally disciplined the organisation through sheer force.'

Nordstrom and Riddersrale reinforce this point in their engaging book, *Funky Business* (2000:82)

'Real leaders challenge people. They do not control them. True leaders set people free.'

Harris (2005:9), writing about distributed leadership in schools states:

'A distributed perspective on leadership moves away from concentrating on those in formal leadership positions to consider those leadership practices that occur daily through informal interaction and collaboration. Distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice: it is the result of interaction between all those who contribute to the life of a school'.

The final aspect highlighted by the Collins research is the fanatical adherence to the Hedgehog Concept, and claims (2001:134) that the *Good to Great* companies, at their best followed a simple mantra: 'Anything that does not fit with our Hedgehog Concept, we will not do. We will not launch unrelated businesses. We will not make unrelated acquisitions. We will not do unrelated joint ventures. If it doesn't fit, we don't do it. Period.'

In contrast, it was found that a lack of discipline to stay within the three circles was a key factor in the demise of nearly all the comparison companies which either lacked the discipline to understand its three circles or lacked the discipline to stay within the three circles. Collins makes the point (2001:136) that it takes discipline to say 'No, thank you' to big opportunities. The fact that something is

a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity' is irrelevant if it doesn't fit within the three circles.

In considering the social sectors, Collins (2005:33) recognises that the desire to 'do good' and the personal desires of donors and funders could drive to undisciplined decisions. Yet these organisations face less pressure for 'growth-for-growth's sake', and generally less executive greed that might drive undisciplined decisions. The level of focus is also important in the world of education where there are so many possible distractions from new, centrally sponsored initiatives.

The notion of a 'stop doing list' was found to be an important outcome in the Collins study. He notes (2001:139) that the *Good to Great* companies displayed 'a remarkable discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk'. These companies, it was found, used this discipline when setting budgets – to decide, not how much each activity got, but which arenas should be fully funded (because they support the Hedgehog Concept) and which should not be funded.

Davies, Davies and Ellison (2005:39) found, when researching strategically focused schools that: 'the leader's skill, lies in knowing when to make the leap to a new way of operating. Such judgement is manifested in not only what and knowing how but also knowing when and, equally importantly knowing what not to do'.

An additional category came out of the study: what to give up, what is called strategic abandonment. It is not only important to time the strategic developments but also to create both personal and organisational space to undertake the new activity and that involves abandoning other things.

(Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005:40)

The main features of a *Culture of Discipline* are:

- A culture of disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and then disciplined action.

- A consistent system which gives people freedom and responsibility within that framework.
- A culture where an ethic of entrepreneurship can thrive
- The impressive commitment of the self-motivated people to the central purpose.
- The distinction between a culture of discipline and a tyranny.
- The importance of ‘fanatical’ adherence to the *Hedgehog Concept*.
- Knowing what not to do or what to abandon in order to focus on the *Hedgehog Concept*.

### *Technology Accelerators*

The attitude of Collins to the inclusion of ‘Technology Accelerators’ as a Key Concept in the *Good to Great* model remains ambivalent. In his book of 2001, he rehearses an argument as to the merits of its inclusion as opposed to the view that the appropriate use of technology was simply another disciplined action taken by the *Good to Great* companies. In the 2005 monograph on the Social Sectors, the model has evolved slightly and the use of technology is not distinguished as a discreet concept. This pragmatic and matter-of-fact approach is shared by other business writers:

For most firms being on the internet is like having a toilet back at the office – necessary but not sufficient for the creation of a competitive edge.

(Nordstrom and Ridderstrale, 2000:86)

In addressing this issue, Collins (2001:147) recognises that technology-induced change is nothing new and that the real question is not about the role of technology, rather, ‘how do *Good to Great* organisations think differently about technology?’ His answer is that the only technologies which are relevant to those companies are those (and only those) which link directly to their Hedgehog Concept. Good to Great companies did not begin their transitions with pioneering technology, they first established their relevance and used them as accelerators

not creators of momentum. For those successful businesses that did find technologies to fit their core purpose, they became pioneers in the application of that technology. If the advance was not necessary to be the best, then all that was required was parity with others in the market and if it was irrelevant it could be ignored.

Porter relates the role of technology with competitive advantage:

Technological change is not important for its own sake, but is important, if it affects competitive advantage and industry structure. Not all technological change is strategically beneficial; it may worsen a firm's competitive position and industry attractiveness. High technology does not guarantee profitability. Indeed, many high technology industries are much less profitable than some "low technology" industries due to their unfavourable structures. (Porter, 1985: 164)

In education, new technologies offer many fresh opportunities. Fromm, Hentschke, and Kern (2003: 294), in describing the education leader as educational entrepreneur referred to the increasing reliance on technology for service delivery, organization and operation:

Rapid developments in technology are driving down dramatically the cost of handling information in existing organizations, but they also are influencing significantly the form and creation of new education ventures.

Similarly, evidence from the Collins study (2001:157) did not support the idea that technological change played a principal role in the decline or perpetual mediocrity of the comparison companies. 'Certainly, technology is important – you can't remain a laggard and hope to be great. But technology by itself is never a primary cause of either greatness or decline'.

Rapid developments and increased accessibility of new technologies for the education world mean that writers in this area too are trying to locate the



application alongside learning and increased effectiveness. Collarbone (2003: 380) writing about leadership in the learning community believes that:

information and communications technologies will be developed to become a central, integrative and interactive part of the learning cycle. The school will become the hub of a learning community, involving parents, pupils, teachers and other stakeholders, linked through virtual and real-time access. This learning community will not be confined to the immediate neighbourhood, but will constitute part of the global learning network.

Even in 1998, Bentley recognized IT as an environment and a tool:

Students would use IT resources, not just to gain access to information, but to analyze, synthesize and present it in a range of contexts. Computer-based environments could be used to learn about how complex systems work, for example in biology, the natural environment, city planning and a host of other applications. They would learn to apply systematic perspectives to every step of life, learning a 'meta-curriculum' of thinking strategies and techniques by paying attention to the importance of good thinking in all the learning activities, they undertake. (Bentley, 1998:185)

David Carter - Principal of John Cabot CTC, Bristol, offers a current, headteacher's perspective on building an e-learning solution to the personalised learning agenda, in a presentation to BECTA in January 2006. [Figure 5 *The E-Confident School – Creating a strategy for E-Learning*]

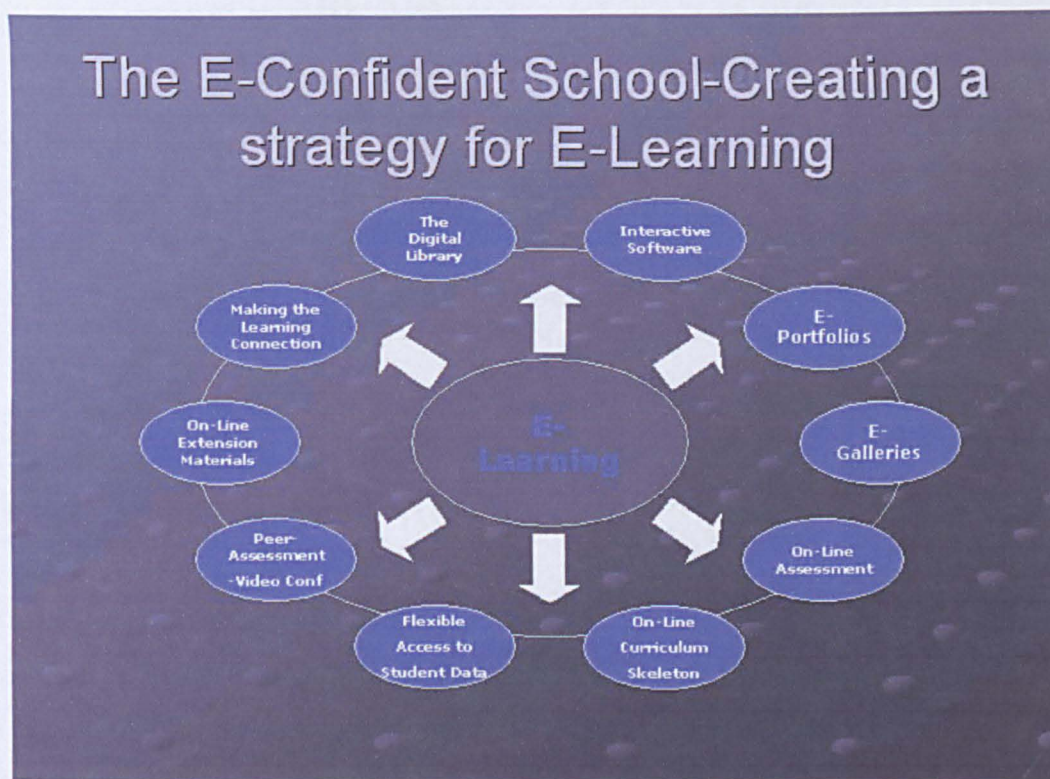


Figure 5 *The E-Confident School – Creating a strategy for E-Learning*

Michael Sandler (2003:287) describes the influence of the technology age on the emerging education industry:

While the promise of technology was an early driver for the emerging education industry, the impact of technology on education has only just begun. Technology integration into schools has ushered in a new era of innovation for the education industry. The last decade of the 20th century, saw internet access at the classroom level soar.

Technology has generated significant growth in education markets, and acceptance of for-profit involvement in the improvement of education is a mainstream concept. However, the education markets, technically, have yet to emerge as a true industry. ... the acceleration of the education industry has only just begun. (Sandler, 2003:290)

Millot, Collar, and Jacob (2003: 332) in an article entitled *Social Investing for Our Children's Future*, recognise the possibilities of increased efficiency:

American schools, and perhaps schools in many other countries, are at a cross-roads. They are being asked to produce much higher levels of student learning, without commensurate increases in dollars. Recent research shows that movement forward on this challenge is possible, by adopting new and more effective educational strategies, which use computer technologies to greater degree.

Collins (2001:160) contrasts the response to technology of *Good to Great* companies which are motivated by a deep creative urge and an inner compulsion for 'sheer unadulterated excellence for its own sake as opposed to those who build mediocrity who are motivated more by the fear of being left behind.'

David Martin, Principal Educational Consultant to the Microsoft Education Group, and formerly a head teacher is clear about what is required for a school to maximize the potential of ICT:

'Crucially the head teacher and leadership team, must possess enough knowledge of the technology to understand its possibilities.'

(Martin, 2005:5)

But the underlying message of the Collins research was that the use of technology was just one of many disciplined actions following disciplined thought by disciplined people.

The most critical resource wears shoes and walks out the door around five o'clock every day... How you attract, retain and motivate your people is more important than technology; how you treat your customers and suppliers, more important than technology.

(Nordstrom and Ridderstrale, 2000:86)

The main features for *Technology Accelerators* are:

- Good to Great organisations think differently about technology and technological change than mediocre ones.
- Good to Great companies avoid technology fads and bandwagons, but become pioneers in the application of carefully selected technologies.
- The key is the direct relationship between a technology and the Hedgehog Concept.
- Good to Great companies used technology as an accelerator of momentum and not a creator of it.

### *The Flywheel and the Doom Loop*

Collins (2001:164) invites us to picture a huge, heavy flywheel – a massive metal disk mounted horizontally on an axle, about 30 feet in diameter, 2 feet thick, and weighing about 5,000 pounds. The task is to get the flywheel rotating on the axle as fast and as long as possible. Pushing with supreme effort, it is only possible to get the flywheel to move imperceptibly at first, then it inches forward and after a few hours of persistent effort, the flywheel has completed one entire turn. Continued pushing means that the flywheel begins to move a bit faster and the second rotation does not take quite as long. The consistent direction of the pushing means that the number of rotations continues to climb until, at some point, there is a breakthrough and the momentum of the wheel ‘kicks in’ and the flywheel goes faster and faster but there is no need to push any harder than at the first revolution. Each turn of the flywheel builds upon the work done earlier, compounding the investment of effort. It would not be appropriate to credit any one push with this momentum, even if some pushes may have been bigger than others, but any single heave – no matter how large – reflects a small fraction of the entire cumulative effect upon the flywheel.

The *Good to Great* transformation never happened in ‘one fell swoop’ – rather the process resembled relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, and building up momentum until and beyond a point of breakthrough. There was no single defining action, no grand programme, no one ‘killer innovation’, no solitary lucky break, no wrenching revolution. Good to Great, Collins claims, comes about by a cumulative process – step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel – that adds up to sustained and spectacular results. This was contrasted with successive short term transformation programmes which could send a company into a ‘doom loop’.

An important aspect of the ‘flywheel’ metaphor is that it needs to be pushed in the appropriate direction - Davies and Ellison (2003:3) might describe this as a ‘strategic intent’ and they define this as effective in a situation where the school knows what it wants to achieve, but does not as yet know how to get there. The school has to go through a process of building capacity and capability to understand fully the nature and dimensions of the strategic challenge and then has to work out how to establish a successful process for achieving those intents.

Although it appeared to the *Good to Great* researchers like there may have been a breakthrough moment in the successful companies, they discovered that it was anything but that to the people experiencing the transformation from within. Collins (2001:170) includes a table entitled ‘No Miracle Moment’ in *Good to Great* which includes quotes from the senior executives at all of the thriving businesses which underlines the point that there was no launch event, tag line or programmatic feel at all and that some executives said that they weren’t even aware that a major transformation was under way until they were well into it. It was often more obvious after the fact than at the time.

Collins found (2001:174) that the *Good to Great* companies understood that tremendous power exists in the fact of continued improvement and the delivery of results. Leaders of the successful businesses were found to highlight tangible accomplishments – however incremental at first – and show how these steps fitted into the context of an overall concept that would work. It was found that, not only outside investors, but also internal constituent groups could see and feel

the build up of momentum and would line up with enthusiasm. Through this approach the Good to Great companies managed to gain incredible commitment and alignment – they managed change without making it a big deal. They found that when the flywheel was spinning they did not need to fervently communicate goals, that people just extrapolated from the momentum of the flywheel for themselves.

This sense of being engaged with the momentum and ‘flow’ of the flywheel is reflected in the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1997:28) who, in his studies of the psychology of optimal experience deals with the development of a more complex self through challenging engagement with everyday life: ‘fulfilling engagement with everyday life requires focus, assistance and modification, said that the heart, will, and mind are on the same page.’

In exploring the social sectors Collins (2005:24) believes that the flywheel effect is also relevant: ‘Success breeds support and commitment, which breeds even greater success, which breeds more support and commitment – round and around the flywheel goes. People like to support winners.’ The consistent direction of the flywheel was also important in managing the constraints of the environment. For institutions in the social sectors this may mean being part of a larger, less flexible system and for the original *Good to Great* companies and their comparators it meant the short term pressures of the financial markets. All the companies in the study faced the same pressures and constraints, but it was shown that those who had the patience and discipline to follow the build-up breakthrough model of the flywheel despite those pressures were the ones that achieved greatness.

In contrast to the flywheel effect, Collins (2001:178) describes the very different pattern at the comparison companies as ‘The Doom Loop’. These companies frequently launched new programmes, often with great fanfare, aimed at ‘motivating the troops’. They sought the single defining action, grand programme or ‘killer innovation’ the miracle moment that would allow them to skip the arduous build up stage and jump straight to breakthrough. They would push the flywheel in one direction, then stop, change course, and throw it in a

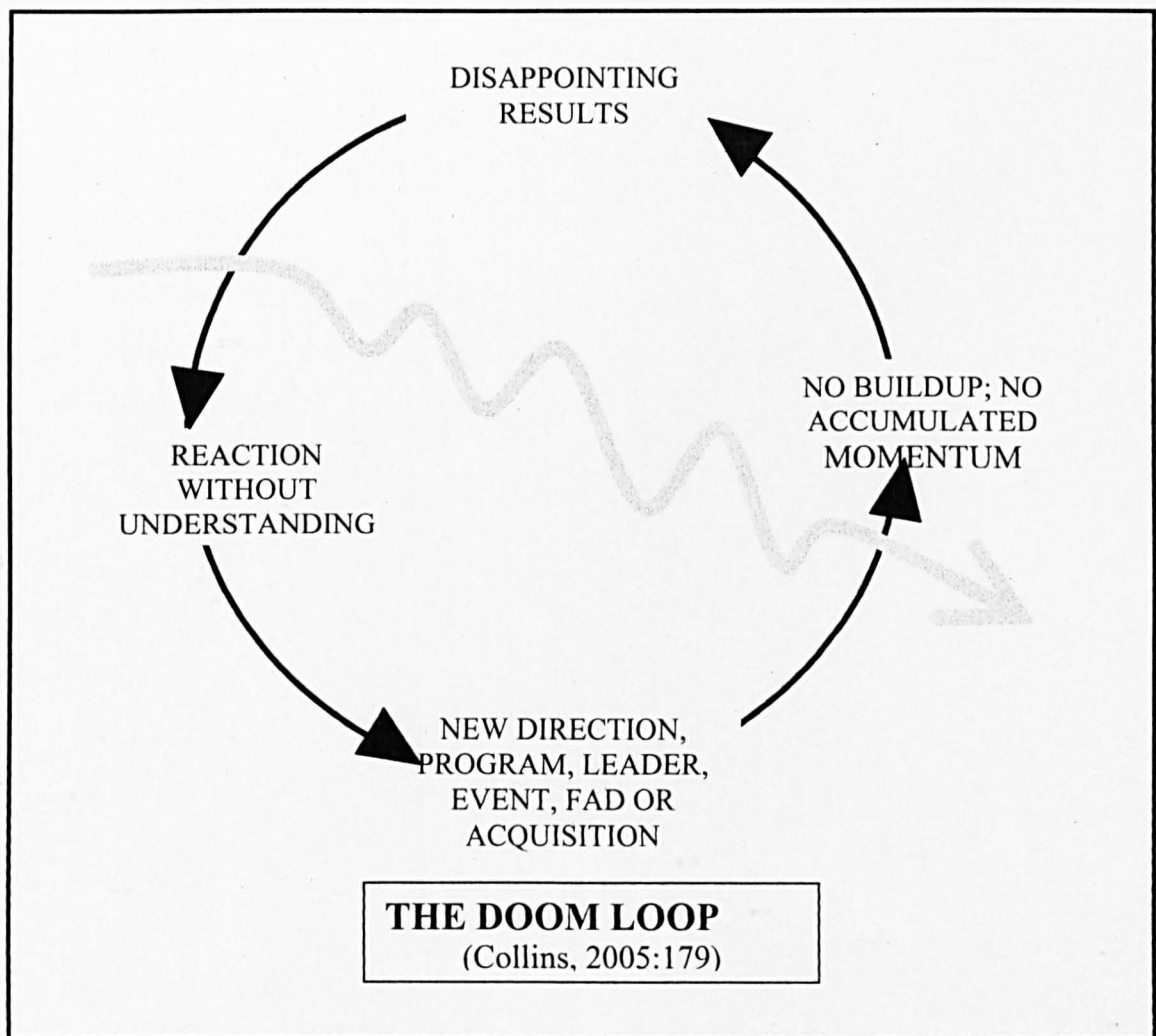
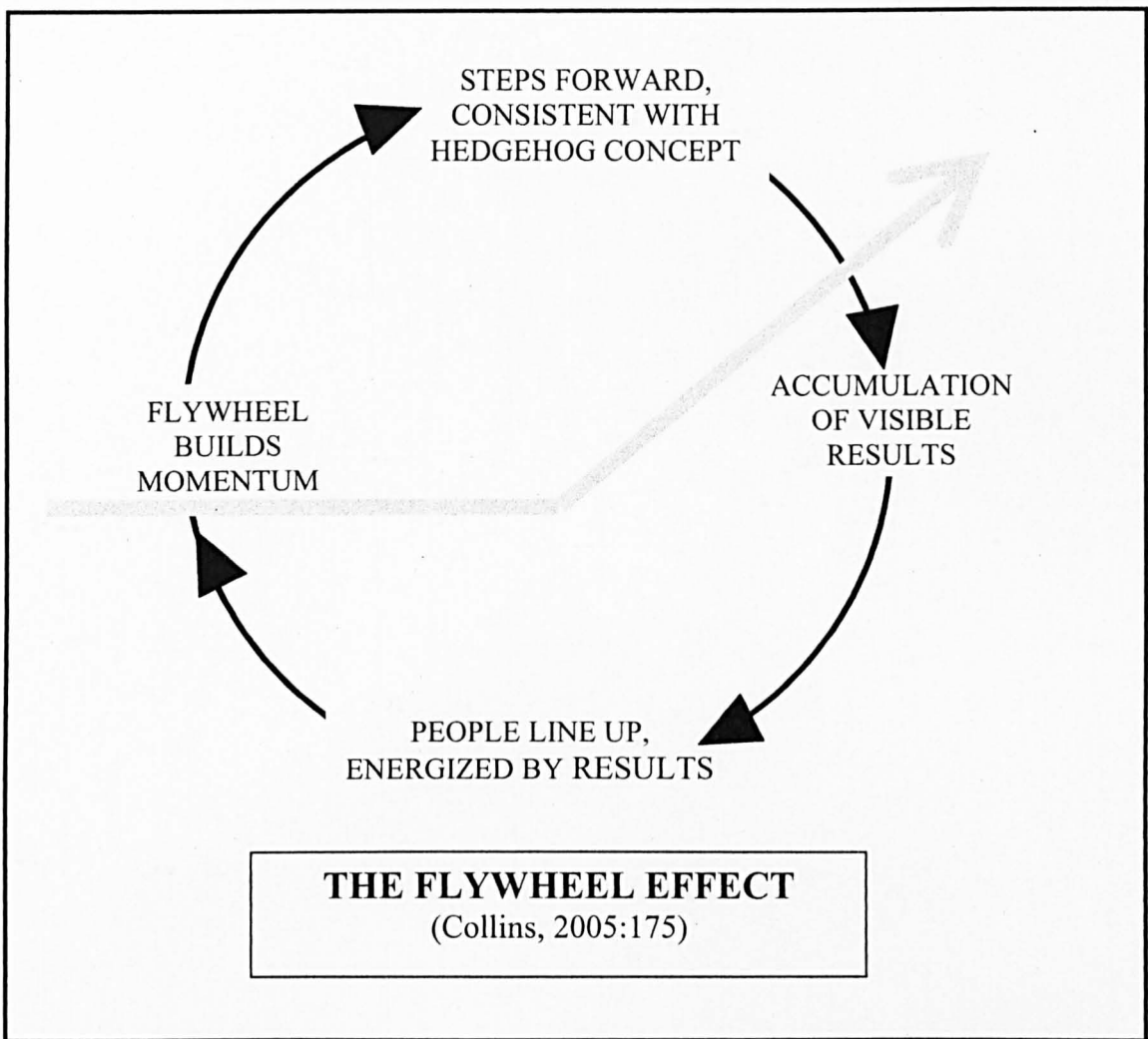
new direction – and then they would stop, change course, and throw it in yet another direction. After years of lurching back and forth, the comparison companies failed to build sustained momentum and fell instead into what was termed the doom loop.

‘To build may have to be the slow and laborious task of years. To destroy can be the thoughtless act of a single day’ – Sir Winston Churchill

The study revealed two main reasons for changes in direction in the comparator businesses. Examples were found where a core business was not doing so well and the company would make a big acquisition to increase growth, diversify away from its troubles, or to make the chief executive look good. This action prevented a single focus (Hedgehog Concept) and a build up of momentum in a consistent direction (Flywheel effect) – and whilst the acquisition may have helped to achieve growth it was found that it created the joining together of ‘two mediocrities’ and not a great company. *Good to Great* companies also made acquisitions but only when the build-up had started – they were used to accelerate the flywheel and move the company in a consistent direction. The second reason was a change of chief executive, where the new incumbent, who may have come from outside the company, did not understand the Hedgehog Concept, and so took the business along a different path: a path which did not lead to greatness.

The elements of both the flywheel and doom loop are illustrated in the following figures from Collins:

- Figure 6: The Flywheel Effect
- Figure 7: The Doom Loop





The main features of *the Flywheel and Doom Loop* are:

- *Good to Great* transformations often look like dramatic, revolutionary events to those observing from the outside, but they feel like organic, cumulative processes to people on the inside.
- Transformations did not happen in one fell swoop. There was no single defining action, no grand programme, no killer innovation, no miracle moment.
- Sustainable transformation follows a predictable pattern of build-up and breakthrough – like pushing a heavy flywheel, until, after a long period of time it builds momentum.
- The doom loop effect was recognised where companies tried to skip the build-up and jump straight to breakthrough – following disappointing results, they would lurch back and forth, failing to maintain a consistent direction.

It is hoped that this review of literature has provided an insight into the outcomes of the *Good to Great* research by Collins and his team, framed, as they are, around seven Key Concepts. The review has also located the Collins study in the context of a wider perspective of the literature – some coming from the world of business but mainly from the locus of educational research. The relevance of *Good to Great* has been explored in this new context and a degree of connectivity has been identified. This thesis asks the question as to what extent the *Good to Great* model may provide a framework for some schools in the UK, and the links demonstrated in the literature offer a sound basis for research.

# Methodology

## Introduction

Collins (2001:1) proposes a number of elements which contributed to differences between the great companies and their comparator companies, which were often successful, but not to the same degree as the great companies. Seven Key Concepts are presented from the research and these are briefly set out below.

*Level 5 Leadership* – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

*First Who...Then What* – *Good to Great* leaders first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, the right people in the right seats – and then they figured out where to drive it.

*Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith)* – unwavering faith that one can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties and at the same time to have the discipline to confront the brutal facts of the current reality, whatever they might be.

*The Hedgehog Concept* – to focus on the *core business*, and to make that core business something you can be the best at.

*A Culture of Discipline* – No need for excessive controls – disciplined people with disciplined thought with an ethic of entrepreneurship to create great performance.

*Technology Accelerators* – the companies studied did not use technology as the primary means of igniting transformation, although they were pioneers of carefully selected technologies to support other strategies.

*The Flywheel and the Doom Loop* – The *Good to Great* transformation never happened in one fell swoop – rather the process resembled relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, and building up momentum until and beyond a point of breakthrough. This was contrasted with successive short term transformation programmes which could send a company into a ‘doom loop’.

The research question is to what extent this package of elements, or indeed which individual elements devised from a study of American companies are relevant in the context of ten successful English schools.

## Research Question

The aim of this research project is to understand to what extent the findings of Collins’ *Good to Great* are relevant in the context of ten schools in England. It will not be possible to replicate the process from the Collins study as I do not have the same resource in terms of a project team, a two-year timescale or financial support. However I have tried to recognise elements of the process in a greatly scaled-down form.

All social research is a coming together of the ideal and the feasible.  
(Bryman, 2001:23)

Similarly as the original research was based on a large number of commercial organisations based in the USA, the context for this study is very different, focussing on ten schools in England.

The Thesis Guide (University of Hull, 2005:3) gives ‘applying existing models to new situations’ as an appropriate example for thesis material. Lofland and Lofland (1995: 11-14) encourage researchers to investigate areas that are of personal interest to them. The nature of this investigation responds to each of the above.

Bryman (2001: 523) proposes a number of characteristics which research questions should exhibit. They should be: clear; researchable; connected with established theory and research; linked with each other; able to make an original contribution to the topic; feasible. Robson (2002:59) identifies similar characteristics: clear; specific; answerable; interconnected; and substantively relevant. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:74) invite the researcher to deconstruct the general research purpose into more specific research questions in a process they describe as 'operationalization'.

The literature review has demonstrated an educational context for the Collins findings and so has established the connections with theory and research for this study. The *Good to Great* principles have not yet, to my knowledge, been investigated in relation to schools in the UK and so it is possible that this paper may make an original contribution to the topic. The application of *Good to Great* to UK schools is clearly researchable using similar research tools to Collins although the scale of this study is rather different from that of the Collins team. It is worth considering a deconstruction of the purpose of this investigation in order to enhance clarity.

Relevant is defined by *Answers.com* as 'Having a bearing on or connection with the matter at hand.' Its roots lie in the Latin *relevāre*, to relieve, raise up. A question in this research is to identify any bearing or connection between the key features of the Collins work and the progress of ten UK schools in achieving greatness. The same source offers a definition for extent as 'the point or degree to which something extends' and the next, related question is to recognise the degree to which there may be some connection between the original research and the findings of this investigation. The interpretation of 'great' in relation to the companies in the Collins study is discussed in the literature review. For this investigation, outstanding schools have been identified with reference to their Ofsted inspection reports. It is recognised that this is not the only way to recognise quality in educational provision and that many teachers hold a negative view of 'Ofsted snapshots'. It is considered an appropriate method of appraisal for this paper because the Ofsted framework is applied nationally and objectively and reports on a number of different aspects of educational provision in a school.

The use of Ofsted reports is a proxy for the initial, quantitative study involved in establishing the *Good to Great* set in the Collins research and it is recognised that further detailed analyses of school indicators over time would be outside the scope and feasibility of this project.

## Research approach

The exploration of an existing model may suggest that this research project will tend to be largely deductive in nature. It is an assumption which is worthy of further consideration. In logic, the two broad methods of reasoning are often referred to as deductive and inductive approaches.

Deductive reasoning works from the more general to the more specific. Sometimes this is informally called a "top-down" approach. The process might begin with thinking up a theory about a topic of interest. It then narrows that down into more specific hypotheses that can be tested. It narrows down even further when observations are collected to address an hypotheses. This ultimately leads to the ability to test the hypotheses with specific data - a confirmation (or not) of original theories.

Inductive reasoning works the other way, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories. Informally, this is sometimes called a "bottom up" approach. In inductive reasoning, the process begins with specific observations and measures, which may detect patterns and regularities, formulate some tentative hypotheses that can be explored, and finally ends up developing some general conclusions or theories.

These two methods of reasoning are likely to have a very different "feel" to them in conducting research. Inductive reasoning, by its very nature, is more open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning. Deductive reasoning is narrower in nature and is concerned with testing or confirming hypotheses. Even though a particular study may look like it's purely deductive (e.g., an experiment designed to test the hypothesized effects of some treatment on some outcome),

most social research involves both inductive and deductive reasoning processes at some time in the project. Even in the most constrained experiment, the researchers may observe patterns in the data that lead them to develop new theories. [See Figure 7: Research Approaches]

Robson (2002:62) recognises a distinction between 'theory verification' and 'theory generation' in research. He contrasts Positivist methodology, which has traditionally formed formal hypotheses from it, and designs the study to test these hypotheses, with flexible design research and theory generation.

In presenting a history of logical approaches, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:4) identify the processes of induction and deduction and recognise that these were followed by the inductive-deductive approach. In Mouly's words, this consisted of:

A back-and-forth movement in which the investigator first operates inductively from observations to hypotheses, and then deductively from these hypotheses to their implications, in order to check their validity from the standpoint of compatibility with accepted knowledge. After revision, where necessary, these hypotheses are submitted to further test through the collection of data specifically designed to test their validity at the empirical level. (Mouly 1978:5)

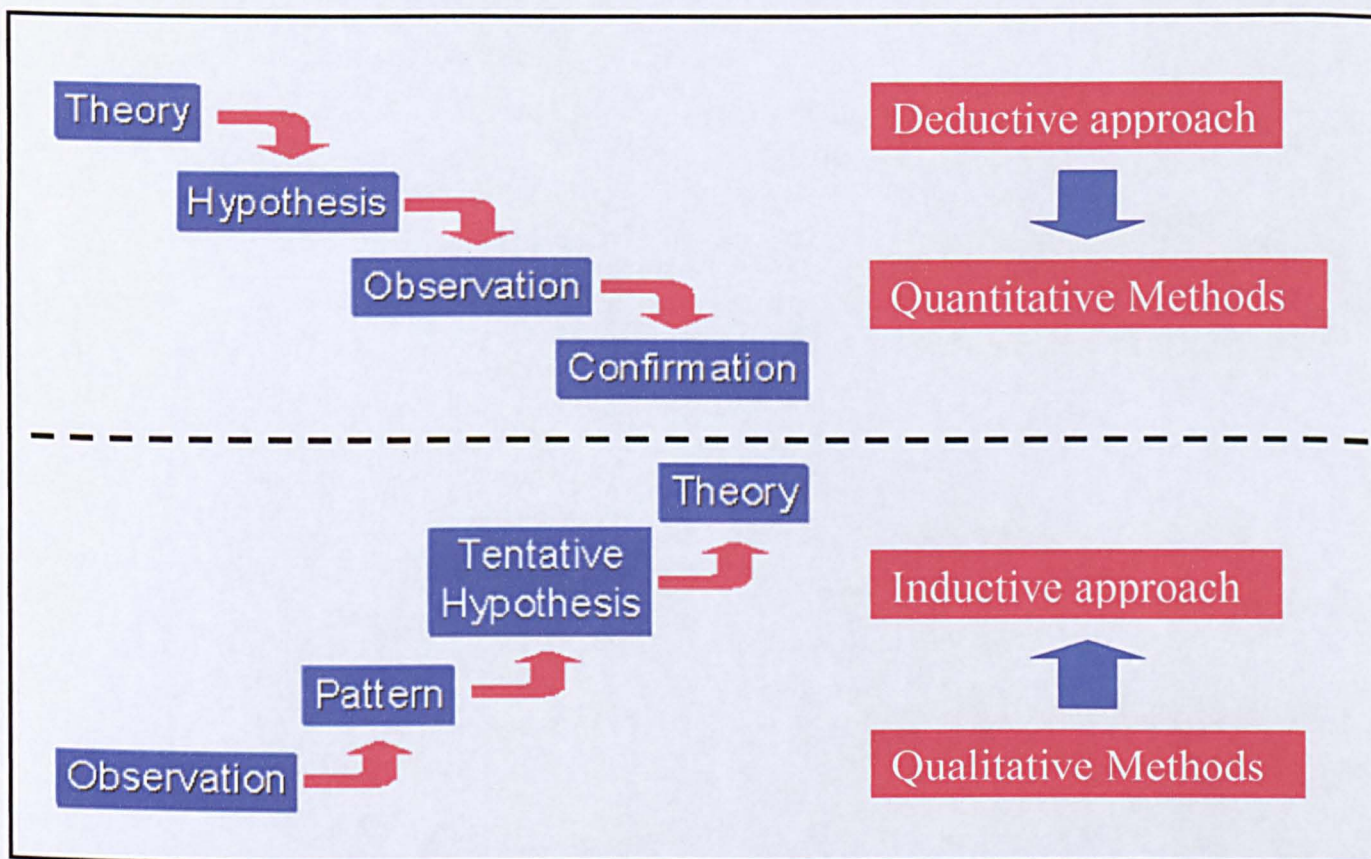


Figure 8. Research Approaches - Adapted from Schutt, (1999)

Bryman also describes a ‘publications-as-theory-strategy’ (Bryman, 2001:7) - where research is conditioned by and directed towards research questions that arise out of an interrogation of the literature. ‘The literature acts as a proxy for theory. In many instances, theory is latent or implicit in the literature.’

In the case of this research project, the model is taken directly from the literature and the model is made explicit in the original study. Embedded in the model are the concepts which will be the foci for the research analysis. Whilst there will be a deductive aspect to this research it will also be inductive – as the model is explored in a new context some elements may be varied or new concepts introduced in an iterative strategy.

The researcher may want to establish the conditions in which a theory will and will not hold. Such a general strategy is often called iterative: it involves a weaving back and forth between data and theory. (Bryman, 2001:10)

Bryman goes on to associate deductive strategy with a quantitative approach and an inductive strategy with a qualitative approach but recognises that the issues are not clear-cut and that deductive and inductive strategies may be better thought of as tendencies rather than hard-and-fast distinctions. (Bryman, 2001:11). Some qualitative researchers argue that qualitative data can and should have an important role in relation to the testing of theories. Silverman (1993), in particular, has argued that in more recent times qualitative researchers have become increasingly interested in the testing of theories and that this is a reflection of the growing maturity of the strategy.

Certainly, there is no reason why qualitative research cannot be employed in order to test theories that are specified in advance of data collection. In any case, much qualitative research entails the testing of theories in the course of the research process. (Bryman, 2001: 270)

Robson (2002:61) recognises that 'Theory' can mean very different things to different people. In very general terms, he describes it as 'an explanation of what is going on in the situation, phenomenon or whatever we are investigating.'

There are examples of studies in which qualitative research has been employed to test rather than to generate theories, for example Adler and Adler (1985) were concerned to explore the issue of whether participation in athletics in higher education in the USA was associated with higher or lower levels of academic achievement.

This research project will use largely qualitative methods as the Collins model will be explored through a paradigm of interpretivism – which requires the researcher to 'grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2001:13). What Robson (2002: 87) would describe as 'flexible design'. The original



(Collins) process moved from quantitative methods in the selection of research objects to a qualitative study of those companies. Similarly in this research, it will be the views of headteachers that will be sought – what they feel or judge to be important in making a school a great school. Therefore the approach may be described as phenomenological.

The phenomenologist views human behaviour...as a product of how people interpret the world...In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behaviour, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person's point of view. (Bogdan and Taylor 1975:13-14)

Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view.

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:267)

According to Robson (2002:167), within the realist framework it is held that theory, rather than data or the methods used to produce those data, is central to explaining reality. This is fully consonant with the view which he develops that it is the research questions which drive the design of the study, whether it be flexible or fixed; and that these questions have to be linked to theory, whether pre-existing which is to be tested by the research, or new theory which is generated by the process of the research.

Hence a critical realist view has no problems with flexible design research, or with the use of qualitative data. As pointed out by Anastas and MacDonald:

Flexible or qualitative methods have traditionally included the researcher and the relationship with the researched within the boundary of what is examined. Because all any study can do is to approximate knowledge of phenomena as they exist in the real world (fallibilism) the process of the study itself must be an object of study. Because all methods of study can only produce approximations of reality and incomplete understandings of the phenomena of interest as they exist in the real world, the findings of

flexible research can be seen as no more or less legitimate than those of any other type of study. (Anastas and MacDonald 1994: 60)

## Research Method - Case Study

Yin (1981) defines case study as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple forms of evidence.

A case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle. (Nisbet and Watt, 1984:72)

Case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. (Stake 1995:9)

Case study was until recently commonly considered in methodology texts as a kind of 'soft option', possibly admissible as an exploratory precursor to some more 'hard-nosed' experiment or survey, or as a complement to such approaches but of dubious value by itself. In contrast, Valsiner (1996:11) claims that: 'the study of individual case has always been the major (albeit often unrecognized) strategy in the advancement of knowledge about human beings.' In a similar vein, Bromley (1986:xi) maintains that: 'the individual case study or situation analysis is the bed-rock of scientific investigation'. Cook and Campbell (1979:96) see case study as a fully legitimate alternative to experimentation in appropriate circumstances, and make the point that: 'case study as normally practised should not be demeaned by identification with the one-group post-test-only design. In Robson's view (2002:180), case study: 'is not a flawed experimental design; it is a fundamentally different research strategy with its own designs.

Examples of case studies of single schools include those by Ball (1981) and by Burgess (1983) on Beachside Comprehensive and Bishop McGregor respectively. More recently, Richard Hatcher (2005) has published a case study

of a comprehensive school which investigates the distribution of leadership and power in schools.

Bryman (2001:49) recognises a tendency to associate case studies with qualitative research as qualitative methods such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing which generate intensive and detailed information are often used, but argues that case studies are frequently sites for the employment of both quantitative and qualitative research.

Nisbet and Watt (1984) identify a number of strengths of case study and these may be summarised as follows: the immediacy and accessibility of the findings and how they are presented; the capture of unique features which may be a key to understanding whilst providing insights into similar situations; flexibility in terms of resource requirements and the capacity to build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables. They also recognise weaknesses to the approach: vulnerability to bias on the part of the observer or participants where cross checking may not be possible; and a lack of generalizability to other cases.

Whilst acknowledging the weaknesses of case study, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:181) appreciate that case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis and that:

Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:181)

In their study of the factors that contribute to competitive success among large British companies, Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) adopted a multiple-case study approach. They examined eight companies, which were made up of a successful and unsuccessful company in each of three commercial sectors (automobile manufacturing; merchant banking; and book publishing). An additional company drawn from life insurance was also included in the sample. By strategically choosing companies in this way, they asserted that they could establish the

common and differentiating factors that lay behind the successful management of change.

An example of multiple-case studies of schools would be research by Kogan et al. (1984) which used unstructured interviews, observations and study of documents. The Governing Bodies of eight schools were examined over a period of three years. More recently, the influential work of the 'Learning to Learn' initiative was explored through a multiple-case study approach by James, Black, McCormick, Pedder and Wiliam (2006).

Stake (1994) describes this approach as collective case studies (groups of individual studies that are undertaken to gain a fuller picture) – because case studies provide fine grain detail they can also be used to complement other, more coarsely grained ...kinds of research. Cohen et al. (2000:183) believe that:

Case study material in this sense can provide powerful human-scale data on macro-political decision –making, fusing theory and practice. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:183)

Bryman (2001:55) considers the main argument in favour of multiple-case study is that it improves theory building and that by comparing two or more cases, the researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold.

However, Dyer and Wilkins (1991: 617) are less convinced about the merits of multiple-case study research and argue that this approach tends to mean that the researcher pays less attention to the specific context and more to the ways in which cases can be contrasted.

Robson (2002:183) describes the study of more than a single case in order to gather a 'sample' as a misconception, as it is unlikely that through sampling some generalization to some population may be made. Yin (1994:177) makes the useful analogy that carrying out multiple case studies is more like doing multiple experiments which may, amongst other things choose to focus on an area not

originally covered in the initial case. Robson goes on to state that: 'cases are selected where the theory would suggest either that the same result is obtained, or that predictably different results will be obtained... Support for the theory may be qualified or partial in any particular case, leading to revision and further development of the theory, and then probably the need for further case studies.

In the research project by Collins, quantitative data were used in the selection of cases, which went through several 'cuts' to get to a *Good to Great* set of eleven companies. This set was examined through the use of document scrutiny, financial analysis and executive interviews. Comparison companies 'that did not make the leap' were studied similarly and so the approach may be described as a multiple-case study using a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The research which forms the focus of this project consists of ten case studies which in some ways relate to each of Yin's (1984:44) three categories for case studies: Two of them were originally *exploratory* (as a pilot to other studies or research questions) in that this research was used as a pilot for the subsequent thesis; *descriptive* (providing narrative accounts) as the studies will be concerned with 'the story' about each school's journey to excellence as seen through the eyes of the headteacher; and also *explanatory* (testing theories) as the Collins *Good to Great* model will be investigated in a different context.

## Sampling

Strategic sampling that attempts to establish a good correspondence between research questions and the sample is described by Bryman (2001:333) as *purposive sampling*: Where the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions. In purposive sampling, a sample is selected with a *purpose* in mind. It is usual to have one or more specific predefined groups which are sought.

Trochim (2006) describes 'Expert Sampling as a specific type of purposive sampling:

Expert sampling involves the assembling of a sample of persons with known or demonstrable experience and expertise in some area. Often, we convene such a sample under the auspices of a 'panel of experts'. There are actually two reasons you might do expert sampling. First, because it would be the best way to elicit the views of persons who have specific expertise. In this case, expert sampling is essentially just a specific sub-case of purposive sampling.

Bryman (2001:51) considers classification for types of cases from the literature and identifies the exemplifying case:

Cases are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered. Bryman (2001:51)

Patton (1990:54) recognises purposive sampling where subjects are selected because of some characteristic. He notes that purposive sampling is popular in qualitative research and has proposed the following cases of purposive sampling:

- Theory-Based or Operational Construct - Finding manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to elaborate and examine the construct.
- Convenience - Saves time, money, and effort. Poorest rational; lowest credibility. Yields information-poor cases.

Such a strategy has been employed for this research project, where ten secondary schools have been selected based on an Ofsted report which recognises them as 'excellent schools'. Whilst the ten schools are purposive samples they are also convenience samples as they are located within striking distance of my home in Gloucestershire and the interviews were with ten colleague headteachers who, I anticipated, would agree to my request.

## Research Tool – Semi-structured interview

The research tool selected to collect data for the ten case studies in this assignment is the semi-structured interview.

Any interview is a social encounter between two people, but any social encounter is not an interview. Interviews have a particular focus and purpose. They are initiated by the interviewer, with a view to gathering certain information from the person interviewed. (Johnson, 1994:43)

Robson defines the semi-structured interview more specifically as having:

predetermined questions, but the order can be modified based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate. Question wording can be changed and explanations given; particular questions which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee can be omitted, or additional ones included. (Robson 2002:269)

The interview has been chosen because it will generate qualitative, 'rich' data which will provide an insight into which factors the headteachers interviewed believe contributed to achieving excellence in their schools. For Kvale (1996:11) the use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations.

Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:267)

The link between the type of data sought for this assignment and the use of a qualitative interview is appropriate. Bryman (2001:323) recommends that if a researcher is beginning the investigation with a fairly clear focus, it is likely that the interviews will be semi-structured ones, so that more specific issues can be addressed. He goes on (Bryman, 2001:324) to explain the relevance of this tool to multiple-case study, asserting that the researcher would need some structure in interviews in order to ensure cross-case compatibility.

The prime aim of a structured interview is to get equivalent information from a number of interviewees, information which is uncontaminated by subtle differences in the way in which it is asked for. The semi-structured interview has a similar aim of collecting equivalent information from a number of people, but places less emphasis on a standardised approach. A more flexible style is used, adapted to the personality and circumstances of the person being interviewed. (Johnson, 1994:45)

The rationale for the interview schedule for this assignment relates directly to the *Executive Interviews* from Collins (2001:239/240) *Good to Great* (Appendix 1.D). Bryman (2001:160) notes that the use of existing questions is common practice among researchers and recognises some advantages to this approach: that, in a sense, the questions have already been piloted; and more importantly for this study, they allow comparisons to be made with other research. This may allow for differences in place (US to UK) or environment (businesses to schools) to be indicated.

The aim is to code the answers in relation to the Key Concepts identified in *Good to Great*. The questions are grouped to reflect themes and the opening question is designed to put the interviewee at ease. Types of question are varied to include:

- Background questions
- Descriptive questions
- Experience questions
- Knowledge questions
- Contrast questions



Follow up or probe questions require answers with a level of quantisation or exemplification. The interview is limited to between forty-five and sixty minutes.

## Data Analysis - Coding

Qualitative data have been described as an 'attractive nuisance' by Miles (1979). Words, which are the most common form of qualitative data are variously described as 'rich', 'full', or 'real' and are contrasted with the thin abstractions of number. The collection of words is straight-forward, the complexity lies in the meaningful analysis of this rich data.

Miles and Huberman claim that qualitative analysis can be a very powerful method for assessing causality:

Qualitative analysis, with its close-up look, can identify mechanisms, going beyond sheer association. It is unrelentingly local, and deals with the complex network of events and processes in a situation. It can sort out the temporal dimension, showing clearly what preceded what, either through direct observation or retrospection. It is well equipped to cycle back and forth between variables and processes – showing that 'stories' are not capricious, but include underlying variables, and that variables are not disembodied, but have connections over time.

(Miles and Huberman 1994:147)

Watling (2002:262) notes that with qualitative data in particular it is simply not possible or desirable to treat analysis as a separate activity which is only done at the final stages of a project. The analysis of data takes place throughout the project. It is an iterative and persistent part of the research process.

Miles and Huberman (1994:475) view analysis as consisting of three concurrent 'flows of activity': data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Reduction involves the management of data through the

selection of a sample and through the processes of abstraction and coding of data. Display is to do with the organisation of displaying the information needed – perhaps through matrices, charts, networks etc. Conclusion drawing and verification starts right from the beginning of data collection where the researcher notes patterns, possible structures etc. a process which is accompanied throughout by verification. It is these three flows of activity, together with the activity of collecting the data itself which form a continuous iterative process.

Crabtree and Miller (1992) identify four methods for qualitative analysis which constitute a progression from more to less structured and formal:

- Quasi-statistical methods;
- Template approaches;
- Editing approaches; and
- Immersion approaches

Template approaches are further defined by the use of key codes either on an a priori basis (e.g. derived from theory or research questions) or from an initial read of the data. These codes then serve as a template (or ‘bins’) for data analysis, where the template may be changed as the analysis continues. Text segments which are empirical evidence for template categories are identified. This approach is typified by matrix analysis, where descriptive summaries of the text segments are supplemented by matrices, network maps, flow charts and diagrams.

Miles and Huberman (1994:9) give a sequential list of what they describe as ‘a fairly classic set of analytic moves’:

- Giving codes to the initial set of materials obtained from observation, interviews, documentary analysis, etc.;
- Adding comments, reflections, etc (commonly referred to as ‘memos’);
- Going through the materials trying to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, relationships, sequences, differences between sub-groups, etc.;
- Taking these patterns, themes etc. out to the field to help focus the next wave of data collection;

- Gradually elaborating a small set of generalisations that cover the consistencies you discern in the data;
- Linking these generalisations to a formalised body of knowledge in the form of constructs and theories.

Qualitative data rapidly cumulate, and it is easy to get overwhelmed by unstructured material which can be difficult to deal with Robson (2002:477) believes that coding provides a solution. A code is a symbol applied to a section of a text to classify it or categorize it. Codes are typically related to research questions, concepts and themes.

Coding has been defined by Kerlinger (1970) as the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis.

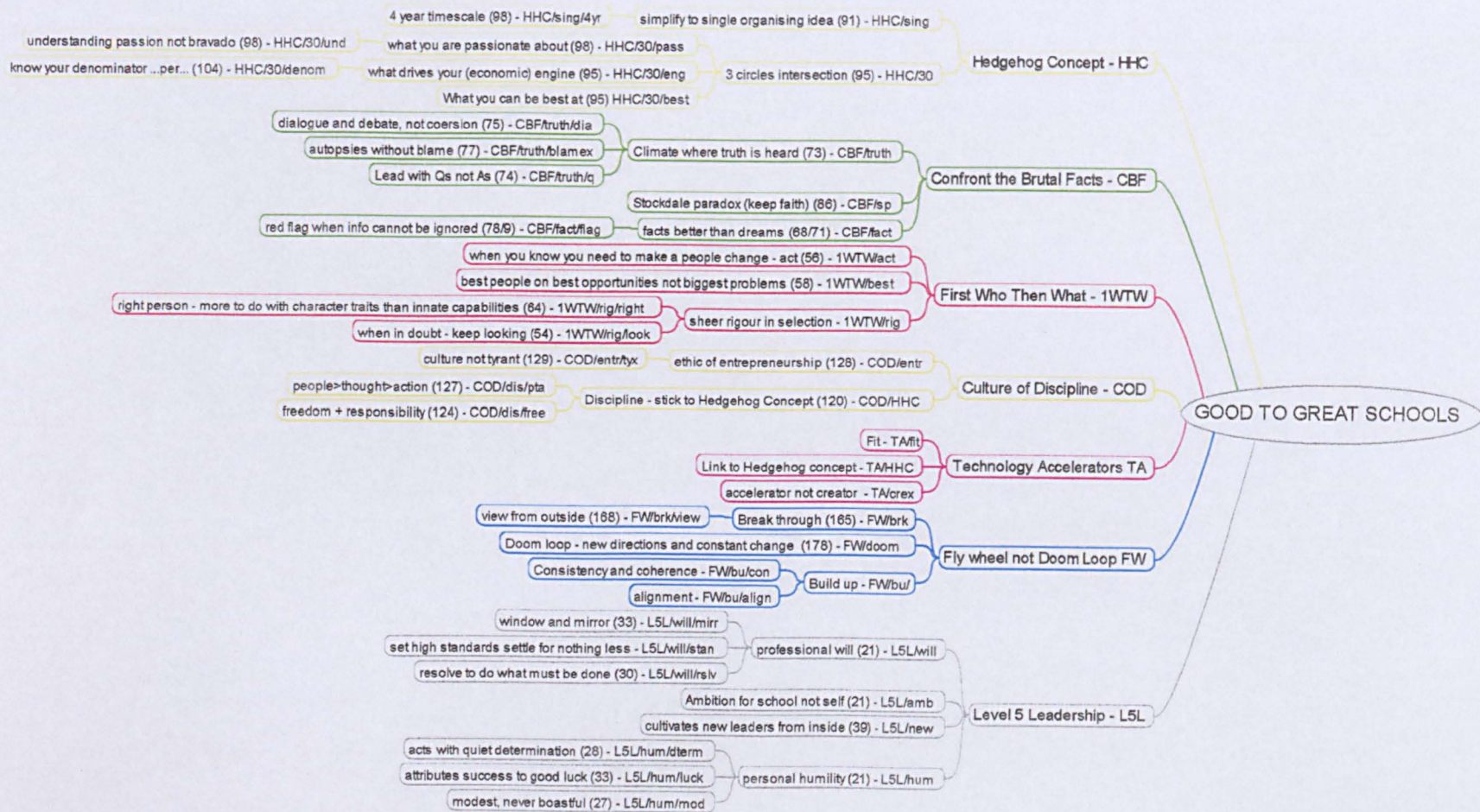
Developing categories usually involves looking forwards towards the overall results of the analysis as well as looking back towards the data. (Dey, 1993:111)

In qualitative data, data analysis is almost inevitably interpretive, so the data analysis is less a completely accurate representation as it might be if using numbers in a positivist tradition, but as Cohen et al. (2000:282) describe: more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter. The tension in data analysis of this type is the tendency to atomise and fragment the data and so lose the context of the whole.

For Charmaz (1983:186), codes...serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile and organize data. This emphasizes an inductive approach where theory is developed from the data. Brenner et al. (1985:144) set out a process of content analysis of open-ended data for testing a hypothesis. The process includes the association of extant work and the categorising of codes which reflect the purpose of the research.

In this investigation the categories for coding in the first instance have been developed from the Collins study. The coding will be recognised from the summaries of 'main features' which follow the discussion of each Key Concept of the Collins research in the literature review of this thesis. Additional categories which have emerged from the interviews have been added. The interviews were recorded using a digital video recorder – so that emphasis and body language may also be reviewed.

Figure 9: Good to Great Schools -  
a Mind Map based on the Key Concepts from the research of Jim Collins



## Reliability and Validity

Hammersly (1987:73) claims that there is no widely accepted definition of reliability or validity. 'One finds not a clear set of definitions but a confusing diversity of ideas. There are substantial divergences among different authors definitions.' Despite this claim, Bush (2002:60) believes there is wide support for the view that reliability relates to the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results.

Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions...A factual question which may produce one type of answer on one occasion but a different answer on another is...unreliable (Bell, 1987:50-51)

[Reliability demonstrates] that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results.

(Yin, 1994: 144)

According to Bush (2002:65) the concept of validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon which it is intended to describe. The research design, the methodology and the conclusions of the research all need to have regard to the validity of the process.

Validity... tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe. If an item is unreliable, then it must also lack validity, but a reliable item is not necessarily also valid. It could produce the same or similar responses on all occasions, but not be measuring what it was supposed to measure. (Bell, 1987: 51)

Validity is the extent to which an indicator is a measure of what the researcher wishes to measure. (Sapsford and Evans, 1984: 259)

Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) reject 'traditional' validity as unhelpful for 'critical' qualitative research and join Bassey (1999) in advocating the alternative concept of 'trustworthiness':

Where traditional verifiability rests on a rational proof built upon literal intended meaning, a critical qualitative perspective always involves a less certain approach characterised by participant reaction and emotional involvement. Some analysts argue that validity may be an inappropriate term in a critical research context, as it simply reflects a concern for acceptance within a positivist concept of research rigour... Trustworthiness... is a more appropriate word to use in the context of critical research. (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1998:287)

The notion of validity had been broadened by the rise of qualitative research. Cohen et al. (2000:105) recognise this breadth in defining the term:

Whilst earlier versions of validity were based on the view that it was essentially a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure, more recently validity has taken many forms. For example, in qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:105)

Internal validity relates to the extent that research findings accurately represent the phenomenon under investigation:

Establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions. (Yin, 1994:143)

Maxwell (1992) has presented a useful typology of the kinds of understanding involved in qualitative research. The main types are description, interpretation and theory. Each of the main types has particular threats to its validity.

The main threat to providing a valid description of what is seen or heard lies in the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data. Therefore audio or video taping should be carried out wherever feasible. The main threat to providing a valid interpretation is that of imposing a framework or meaning on what is happening rather than this occurring or emerging from what is learnt.

The basic principle here is that you are never taking it as self-evident that a particular interpretation can be made of your data but instead that you are continually and assiduously charting and justifying the steps through which your interpretations were made. With theory, the main threat is in not considering alternative explanations or understandings of the phenomena being studied. This can be actively countered by actively seeking data which are not consonant with the theory. (Mason, 1996:150)

Cohen et al. (2000:105) suggest that one way of validating interview measures is to compare the interview measure with another measure that has already been shown to be valid – ‘convergent validity’. In this assignment, the study of recent Ofsted reports on the ten schools concerned were used in selecting the sample and they also provide a ‘reality check’ against the views of the headteachers interviewed. Another way proposed to achieve greater validity is to minimize bias as much as possible. The factors which need to be managed include for the interviewer: attitudes, opinions, and expectations; tendencies to see the respondent in their own image or to seek answers that support preconceived notions; and misconceptions of what the respondent is saying; and for the respondent – a misunderstanding of what is being asked. Awareness of these factors is one way to reduce bias and the use of open questions is another. The revisiting of transcripts for coding may help to reduce misunderstandings.

Reliability is essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents...For research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context, then similar results would be found. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:117)



LeCompte and Preissle (1993:332) suggest that the canons of reliability for quantitative research may be simply unworkable for qualitative research. Quantitative research assumes the possibility of replication; if the same methods are used with the same sample then the results should be the same. Typically, quantitative methods require a degree of control and manipulation of phenomena. This distorts the natural occurrence of phenomena. Indeed the premises of naturalistic studies include the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations, such that the study cannot be replicated – that is their strength rather than their weakness.

For a qualitative interview study to be published, the minimum number of interviews required seems to be between twenty and thirty. (Warren, 2002:99)

Fewer than 60 interviews cannot support convincing conclusions and more than 150 produce too much material to analyse effectively and expeditiously. (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002:223)

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other millieux.

The very nature of this small-scale assignment with only ten interviews has an impact on the transferability of findings and therefore its reliability. There is an attempt to replicate elements of the interviews from the Collins study although it has been acknowledged that a reproduction of a similar scale would not be feasible. The richness of data that will emerge from the ten cases will begin to create a context for judgements about the possibility of transfer of findings to other situations but that is not in the aim or the scope of this research – it is to find out the extent of relevance of the Collins findings to the context of ten schools.

## Research Description

The research question grew from an interest in the work of Jim Collins and his book, *Good to Great*. This was agreed with supervisors.

An understanding of research methodologies was built up over time through lectures, reading and the study of examples and the approach and method described above were also agreed.

Local knowledge and a study of Ofsted reports helped to build a small purposive sample of ten schools for a case study approach.

Semi-structured interviews took place with the headteachers of two schools in the summer term 2005. These interviews acted as a pilot for the subsequent research activity, and the remaining eight interviews took place in the summer term of 2006. The interview questions were based on the executive interviews of the Collins study. Each interview lasted about forty-five minutes and took place in the study of each headteacher. The interviews were filmed using a digital video recorder for ease of transcription and subsequent review.

## Interview Schedule

Could you briefly give an overview of your relationship to the school – years involved and primary responsibilities held?

What do you see as the top five factors that contributed to or caused the upward shift in performance during the years between the first Ofsted inspection and the most recent inspection?

Now lets return to each of those five factors, and I'd like you to allocate a total of 100 points to those factors, according to their overall importance to the transition (total across all five factors equals 100 points).

Could you please elaborate on the [top two or three] factors? Can you give me specific examples that illustrate the factor?

Did the school make a conscious decision to initiate a major change or transition during this time frame?

[If a conscious decision]

- When did the school make the decision?
- What sparked the decision to undertake a major transition?
- What was the process by which the school made key decisions?

How did the school get commitment and alignment with its decisions?

Can you cite specific examples of how this took place?

What did you try during the transition that didn't work?

If I compared this school to similar schools that did not make the transition to become 'outstanding' – what would be different about your school that enabled it to make this transition?

Other schools could have done what you did, but didn't; what did you have that they didn't?

Can you think of one particularly powerful example or vignette from your experience or observation that, to you, exemplifies the essence of the shift of your school from a good school to an outstanding school?

## Discussion of Findings

The research activity was recorded through ten videos and transcripts of interviews which were then coded in relation to the hierarchy of codes noted in the coding chart. [Figure 9 *Good to Great Schools - A Mind Map based on the Key Concepts from the research of Jim Collins*]. The discussion of findings is undertaken from a number of different perspectives:

- An analysis of each individual case study in relation to the Key Concepts from Collins' *Good to Great*.
- An interpretation of main themes which emerged across the range of interviews from the single quasi-quantitative question in the interview schedule. Connections between the themes and the Collins' Key Concepts are then considered.
- An analysis of the *Good to Great* Key Concepts which compares the case studies and draws evidence from across all the interviews.
- A consideration of the most prominent sub-codes in the form of key messages.

### Case Study 1

Case Study 1 is a rural, mixed, comprehensive school with sixth form in Gloucestershire. The school is large (c1200 on roll), serving a relatively prosperous rural community. With some exceptions, overall social and economic conditions are much more advantageous than nationally. The pupils are nearly all white, with less than one per cent coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. English is the mother tongue of virtually all pupils, and very few have special educational needs. Attainment on entry to the school is above average. The school has Technology College status. In its most recent inspection Ofsted described the school as follows :

This is a very good school with some excellent features. Leadership and management and teaching and learning are very effective, enabling pupils and students to achieve very well. (Ofsted 2003:4)

The forty five minute interview took place with the head teacher, JP, on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2005. He has been at the school for seventeen years, eleven as head.

The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and other key staff lead very well overall. (Ofsted 2003:4)

The school was chosen for the purposive sample because it has demonstrated the step from being a good school to being a great school through sustained improvement.

The school has no major weaknesses: all aspects of its work match or exceed national standards. The effectiveness of the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection, even though the school was then judged favourably. (Ofsted, 2003:5)

When JP talked about the success of his school he made reference to each of the seven key elements of the *Good to Great* research categories. In addition he spoke persuasively about the importance of the support of stakeholders. Because of this apparent importance a new coding category was created along with appropriate sub-codes. Another category of 'Environment' was considered as JP spoke about the importance of the physical environment but this was discarded when the coding was reconsidered as these references could also be attributed to the culture of the school and the growth of the use of technology.

The element which JP made greatest reference to was *First Who Then What*. He was clear that the school worked hard to recruit the right people for the job and the culture of the school.

'...having the right people to take you forward, with ideas to keep us constantly on the ball'

'I have been able to sort out people who really are prepared to drive the school forward.'

‘we have a clear idea of what type of person we are looking for.’

‘you just go with a feeling, ‘that’s the right person.’

Perhaps not surprisingly for a head who has invested many years in the school he talked about the importance of the category described as *Fly Wheel no Doom Loop* – the gradual build up of the circumstances of success through the need for consistency and alignment across the school.

‘I think the school is all about continuous improvement. You should never sit back and say well that’s it. There are always ways you can refine and improve your systems.’

‘Well, there was a major decision to go along to much more centralised assessment and recording of assessment and we obviously had to do a lot of persuading with the staff.’

‘Now we decided we had to go softly on this one because we were taking some people from nothing to major step, so at one point we said that we wanted a minimum of every department to do six assessments a year.’

The category with the next greatest number of references in this interview was that of *Culture of Discipline* – there appeared to be a connection here between this and the need to get the ‘right people’ and to align the organisation.

‘I think Performance Management and the School Development Plan are linked together - setting targets. I have got HODs who have a clear understanding that the only way you get departments reaching the targets they have been set and they are held accountable to, is if they get all their team held accountable too, so there is specific target setting and all the time we are judging the teachers against the criteria we have set. We have a ‘ticklist’ of the criteria of what makes them good, effective teachers, that we have agreed as a staff.’

JP demonstrated a number of the attributes ascribed to *Level 5 Leadership*. He was modest but demonstrated a quiet resolve to get things done. He recognised that the school had enhanced the rate of improvement by the appropriate use of technology which was fit for purpose. He also made a number of references to the support offered to the school by governors, parents and pupils.

## Case Study 2

Case Study 2 is a specialist school for boys and girls aged 11 to 18. With 1542 pupils on roll, it is much larger than many other schools nationally. The school, which has technology college status, is situated in BC; it has been over-subscribed for several years. The school serves a wide area, including the immediate locality and areas to the north of C. Pupils are from mixed socio-economic backgrounds; around six per cent are entitled to free school meals, which is below average. Taken as a whole, pupils' attainment on entry is above average. However, in past years, the school has lost some of its potential Year 7 pupils to grammar schools in C and G. Thus, although pupils of all levels of prior attainment join the school, previous intakes have contained significantly fewer higher attaining pupils than is the 'norm' nationally. The school has identified around 12 per cent of its pupils as having special educational needs, which is below average. Just over one percent have statements of special educational needs. Needs include specific learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Most pupils are from white families. Less than one per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is low. Usually, about 80 per cent of pupils move into further education at age 16. In its most recent inspection Ofsted described the school as follows :

This is a very good school that provides a high quality education for all its pupils. GCSE results are well above average and are much higher than would be expected given pupils' attainment on entry. Pupils learn very well as a result of very good teaching. The school has very many strengths and no major areas of weakness. It is led and managed very well. (Ofsted 2002:3)

A fifty minute interview took place with the headteacher, AM on 23rd May 2005. The head has been at the school for five years. This is his second headship.

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has created an ethos wherein everyone is valued and where staff and pupils alike take a pride in their own and others' achievements (Ofsted 2002:4)

The school was chosen for the purposive sample because it has demonstrated the step from being a good school to being a great school through sustained improvement.

Overall, the school has made very good improvement since its last inspection in 1996, when it was already judged to be a good school. (Ofsted 2002:4)

During the interview, AM made reference to each of the seven key elements described in *Good to Great*. He did not give any responses that could be ascribed to the 'new' category of *Stakeholder Support*. For AM the most important element appeared to be the focus on the core business or the *Hedgehog Concept* as it is described in the *Good to Great* research. He was clear that improving the success of pupils was central and this idea came across as a simple and singular focus.

'.... for me a focus on the core business, knowing what our task is .... It's individual pupil rights, individual pupil needs, to know that a pupil has achieved at the very least their expectation, or in most cases, higher than that expectation and at an individual level, it's measuring them on entry, and measuring them on exit, we can say that we know the value that has been added.'

AM was also clear that getting the right people in the right jobs was important (*First Who Then What*)



‘The staffing, accountability and consistency part of it was me recognising that the biggest strength in any organisation, be it a school or anywhere else, are the middle team leaders. Get that right and they, by and large, drive things forward.’

‘I set about developing the ones I could and changing those I couldn’t’

‘Some were in positions which were the wrong positions for them.’

There were a number of references which could be coded in the category for *Level 5 Leadership* and AM’s style demonstrated those attributes of a strong professional will:

‘This is all coloured by ‘this is where we are going, there is no excuse for this, this is the way it is’ and that’s a very clear expectation, it is very important, whether I call it direction, or drive or expectation – there can be no misunderstanding, this is where we are going and you are coming and if you are not, we are not staying with you, you will stay behind.’

AM also recognised the importance of the gradual build-up (*Fly Wheel not Doom Loop*) although he felt it could be achieved more quickly in a second headship. He acknowledged the need for a culture of discipline and identified situations which had to be confronted whilst retaining faith that goals would be realised. (*Confront the Brutal Facts*). He also appreciated the role of technology as an accelerator of school improvement when linked to the core business.

### Case Study 3

Case Study 3 is in origin part of the Cathedral foundation and retains close links with the Cathedral. The school was re-founded by Henry VIII in 1541 and has remained physically and spiritually close to the Cathedral ever since. It occupies a number of monastic and cathedral buildings close to the city centre. It is fully

co-educational and takes pupils from age 3 to 18 and is just over 500 pupils. This is the only independent school in the case studies, it also differs from others in that it covers the primary as well as secondary age range. It has been chosen to be part of the purposive sample because of excellence recognised through an objective inspection and to give a broader perspective to the research. As an independent school, Case Study 3 is not subject to Ofsted inspections but undergoes inspections by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. The recent report described the school most favourably :

The School very successfully achieves its aims. In its distinctive historical setting in the shadow of the Cathedral it provides its pupils with excellent pastoral care and an all-round education in which their academic, social, creative, sporting and recreational skills are fully developed. (ISI 2006:19)

The school's provision and the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding and continue to be great strengths of the school. The aims and the educational ethos of the school stress the needs and growth of the individual pupil. Their successful attainment is evident in the warm, friendly and lively atmosphere and community, supported by an exciting array of stimulating activities. (ISI 2006:8)

There are four grammar schools in the city, and so the ability profile of the School includes many children in the middle range. This is confirmed by the ISI report (2006:5).

The ability range at all levels in the school is quite wide. In the Junior School and up to Year 11 in the Senior School, most pupils are in the second quartile or the bottom of the top quartile of the national ability range. A small number of pupils in each year are in the third quartile.

A forty-five minute interview took place with the Head, PL on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2006. He has been Head of the school for fourteen years. The quality of his leadership was also recognised by the ISI report (2006:17):

The strong lead and sense of purpose of the headmaster have ensured that management and leadership throughout the school are clearly focused and have the confidence needed to maintain the momentum for improvement on many fronts.

During the interview, PL made references to each of the seven Key Concepts from *Good to Great* as well as referring to the additional area of *Stakeholder Support*. Although the coding reveals that he spoke more about a *Culture of Discipline* in the school, he chose to emphasise the people decisions at the beginning of the interview (*First Who then What*).

‘Top of my list would be the appointment of staff ... I put a lot of store by good appointments, and it is fair to say that in recent years I have decided not to appoint on a number of occasions in order to go for a second or third trawl to get right person.... So it pays to put in a lot of time and sometimes money, which may appear disproportionate but it pays in the end. It is the biggest investment a school can make.’

Rigour in making appointments is an important element of Key Concept *First Who then What* and this is reflected in the quotation above – the quality of staff selection and development processes was also recognised in the ISI inspection report (2006:11).

The appointment, development and deployment of sufficient high-quality staff at all levels in the school are well done. Induction procedures are appropriate and new staff throughout the school feel they are very well looked after and encouraged.

PL made the greatest number of references coded to the Key Concept *Culture of Discipline*. His responses covered the full range of sub codes in the area but emphasised the ethic of entrepreneurship as opposed to tyrannical direction.

‘... at no stage have I set either staff or pupils targets for exam results, they set their own, neither have governors imposed education targets or academically imposed any targets. I found that liberating and stimulating. I therefore assume staff, pupils and parents find it liberating too, nothing is imposed. It is brought out, which is what I think education means, drawing out rather than stuffing in.’

The resulting culture was described by PL as :

‘One of the things which the Inspection picked up was this sense of family, the sense of mutual support which exists between pupils/staff, pupils/pupils’

Collins’ notion of *legislative leadership* (2005:12) as opposed to *executive leadership* is reflected in the decision making structures at the school and described by PL in the interview:

‘Sitting on that team meeting on a fortnightly basis is the Head, senior school deputies, one academic and pastoral, junior school head, bursar, who is the financial, administration manager and estates manager ..... They are involved in all decisions that we make, this has helped the culture which I mentioned earlier about understanding each other’s roles.... We discuss everything from fabric to academic development and excellence right through..... That is the main forum for discussion, the first sounding board for my ideas, or ideas which others may have.’

‘We have two or three groups, which have external members from outside the school. It is very important to have that degree of levelling.’

PL described a capacity to *Confront the Brutal Facts* and yet to *keep faith*:

‘Where I may feel adventurous, doesn’t mean that everyone else is going to feel equally adventurous. We went a bit too quickly, in a couple of years they may be ready for it.’

The culture is centred around the central vision for the school, the education of the whole person and an emphasis on the individual and PL referred to this *Hedgehog Concept* during the interview, concluding that:

‘often those things which can’t be measured are most valuable and we mustn’t forget that.’

PL also explained how as an independent school he was not constrained to follow initiatives from the DfES and this explanation relates well to the Key Concept of the *Flywheel and Doom Loop*, where *Doom Loop* companies followed endless new directions and re-launches rather than building a brand with consistency. He referred to the important of *Stakeholder Support* from both governors and parents and his responses reflected the notion that *Technology Accelerators* were just that and that technology did not create greatness on its own.

## Case Study 4

Case Study 4 is a mixed grammar school situated in Gloucestershire. It is recognised as being one of the top schools in the country. In its most recent inspection, Ofsted described the school as follows :

...provides an outstanding education for its students, a view shared by the school, and in doing so enables them to become confident, mature and successful young people (Ofsted 2005:2)

This judgement is supported by the following description :

The school is consistently ranked among the top ten schools in the county in terms of the percentage of top grades and average points scores both at GCSE and A level. (Ofsted 2005:2)

Along with these judgments the following aspects were also recognised:

The school's curriculum and related activities are outstanding

The quality of care, guidance and support of students is outstanding overall.  
(Ofsted 2005:2)

A forty minute interview took place with the Head, RK on 15th May 2006. He has been Head of the school for seven years.

The school is very well led by the headteacher, who gives the school clear direction and vision.

The headteacher is an excellent role model for other leaders in the school and provides a clear vision, strategy and sense of direction. He has enabled the school to become more outward looking and open minded about embracing well-considered initiatives. (Ofsted 2005:3)

During the interview, RK made reference to all of the *Good to Great* Key Concepts except for *First Who Then What* (although he did refer to the importance of staff morale). He was particularly clear about the importance of the culture of the school, which was organic, growing from *disciplined people thought and action* and not *tyrannically* applied.

'There will be two, three, four things that each child at ... enjoys doing and will get involved with and will be in some way or another successful at. That success rubs off, in their self confidence, and the way they feel about .... So when faced with a difficulty, they find Physics difficult, or German difficult, they feel they can tackle it, they also feel they must make a real effort at it, they must not give up.'

This was strongly linked with his *Hedgehog Concept* vision for this already very high performing school.

‘What I am aiming for is an atmosphere in the school where quite clearly there is an expectation of high standards, but set in an atmosphere that is friendly and relaxed, trying to get that balance right, it seems to me that the way to do that is making education a whole experience’

‘It fits with our culture, we want to be demanding’

Similarly, RK felt that the beliefs he held and the way he behaved had a strong influence on the visions, culture and the expectations at the school. A number of references could be coded to reflect *Level 5 Leadership*.

‘My own feeling is that as Head you have got to be seen to be involved, you have to be seen to be positive, I think you have got to be seen to be calm and measured in the way you deal with things.’

‘The head, or the head’s attitude improve the ethos of the school.’

The strength of will, expressed in the interview was supported by the recognition of the need to *Confront the Brutal Facts* and to hear the truth of a situation in a number of references.

‘For lots of reasons, inadvertently it had become complacent and we needed to change that, so we set about, with the support of governors and key members of staff, and have deliberately gone for a number of initiatives that have made us engage with others.’

Each of these areas appeared very evident in the interview with seven references to each. RK also made passing reference to the need for appropriate *Technology Accelerators*, and also recognised how the progress of such a school would be perceived from outside (*Fly Wheel not Doom Loop*). He also referred to the need for *Stakeholder Support* – particularly from Governors.

## Case Study 5

Case Study 5 is a comprehensive school for boys aged 11 – 19 in Kent, with a roll of 1422. There are 1150 boys in Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form of 272 includes 38 girls. Most students come from White heritage backgrounds, though there are small numbers from Mixed, Asian, Black, Chinese and other backgrounds. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is low. The school continues to be a specialist Technology College and has become a Leading Edge school. It has also become the leading school in an Education Action Zone. This school has now appeared in the HMCI List of Outstanding Schools twice and is therefore an appropriate choice for this purposive sample. The most recent Ofsted inspection was in October 2004.

This is a very good school with some excellent features. Leadership and management from the headteacher and senior team are excellent. Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well. A leading feature of the school is its consistent quality. No subject or feature of the school is less than good and very few lessons are unsatisfactory. The school provides very good value for money. (Ofsted, 2004:6)

The interview with the Head, GB, took place on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2006 and lasted fifty five minutes. Of all of the case study interviews, this was the longest and most complex interview to analyse and code. Perhaps this is because GB holds a PhD and has a great interest in school improvement work. He has been Head of the school since 1993, although since 2001 he works three days for the school and three days for the Leadership Strategy of the London Challenge, helping schools in challenging circumstances. It appears from the Ofsted report that leadership of the school has not been negatively affected by the additional work of the Head.

The headteacher gives very strong, committed leadership.  
(Ofsted 2004:23)



Leadership of the school is excellent. The headteacher provides great clarity of purpose and an excellent dedication to the school, its staff and students. Senior staff share his vision and high aspirations, reflected in their excellent leadership of the key programmes which ensure high standards of performance by staff and students, across the school. Leadership of teaching is innovative and very effective, resulting in very good overall standards of teaching, learning and behaviour. These come directly from the excellent sense of direction which leadership gives this large and ambitious school. (Ofsted 2004:3)

Excellent leadership and management are reflected in first-rate systems for the assessment of work and for the management of staff performance and training (Ofsted 2004:6)

The interview responses, when coded, indicated references to *Level 5 Leadership* at twice the level of coding related to any other *Good to Great* Key Concept. The codes revealed a balance between professional will and personal humility and demonstrated an ambition for the school rather than personal ambition.

‘This shows the total reflection of the ambition of the staff, without that ambition it would not have occurred.’

The model of leadership described in this interview had strong links to another key concept, *First Who then What* in that there was strategic awareness in knowing when an initiative might be appropriate and in finding the right person to undertake the process.

‘the role was to get other people to understand that there was a problem and that that was the solution they ought to get involved in. That takes time.’

‘I sit in my office with a load of ideas waiting for someone to come through the door and say we need to do it.’

The notion of *legislative leadership* was also evident – perhaps not surprisingly given the strategic level of the Head’s position.

‘When people come through the door at ... I treat them as if they are going to be a Headteacher.’

The professional resolve of the Head was apparent in a statement which also related to *First Who then What* – the need to act when a person change is required:

‘If that levelling off means they are not moving but are blocking, I remove them.’

*First Who then What* was one of five *Good to Great* Key Concepts which were identified by the codes four or five times each. GB chose to emphasise at the top of the interview what could be described as his *Hedgehog Concept* – the need to raise expectations and to achieve consistency at a high level across the organisation.

‘the first critical issue, which has not gone away, is raising expectations. This has been a huge issue all the way, about how to push people to go a bit further, because if you are going to improve a school’s outcomes, you are basically saying that at the end of each year, you have to do better than before, so to sustain that for a significant period of time, is quite considerable.’

‘it takes a hell of a lot of effort to go from good to outstanding, it doesn’t take a lot to go from satisfactory to good. The step from good to outstanding is hard, because talking about reducing disparity.’

‘That is what outstanding is to me, consistency in our level of performance, rather than a one-off outstanding thing, which schools can have, but the whole thing. This year both drama and music, and PE, so

the extra-curricular things, were outstanding, football, basketball, rugby, it crosses all things.'

GB was clear about the difficulties the school has faced over the long period of his headship. A particular area was the difficulty of retaining and recruiting staff in a part of South London where living expenses are high. In describing this scenario he demonstrated not only his ability to *Confront the Brutal Facts* but also to do something about it and *keep faith*.

'(A) staffing issue hit us, which was beyond our control. We had to respond to demographic changes in London, the whole issue of accommodation, etc. I didn't want to be a victim of circumstances.'

Training and development of staff and of the institution as a learning organisation became a priority.

'we evolved our own model of knowledge capital, we have a view about knowledge management, borrowed capital, social capital, knowledge capital, and organisation capital.'

The relationship between the facing of the facts and the professional will of the leader and his determination to raise expectations also became apparent.

'You don't become an outstanding school standing there thinking you have got it right, you accept the fact that you are going to get it wrong.'

The importance of a common framework for understanding in the organisation was also evident – what Collins might describe as a *Culture of Discipline* – again the links to the *Hedgehog Concept*, the *Level 5 Leadership* and *First Who then What* mean that the coding is less straightforward.

'you have got to know what your students are like, what they should achieve'

'I wanted to be in position that when people came into my room, to be able to say yes to them, here is the support you need, yes, go ahead with it, it is exciting. In order for that to happen, you have to get a shared context in the school, and I think things break down because there is not that shared context. I have never felt it difficult in the school to justify what I am doing when people understand the context. If people understand the context then they will understand the decision.'

GB felt that a consistency of approach over a long period of time has been a major part of the success of Case Study 5 and he made a number of references which could be coded as relating to the *Fly Wheel not Doom Loop*.

'I don't believe that major change is my style. I am more interested in incremental changes, where people feel that things are moving on, raising expectations all the time.'

'Continually restless, don't change in key ways, just tweaks.'

'Lots of things that didn't work, so we have adjusted them as we have gone along. Don't tend to get myself stuck on something, if things go wrong. If staff are doing it and it is not working, I would throw it out.'

'People say I am a risk taker, load of rubbish, I don't take any risks. I take calculated movements forward, so it doesn't go wrong. If you want sustained improvement, you have to build on steps of success.'

GB made no references which could be coded in the area of *Technology Accelerators* – perhaps surprising for a school which became one of the country's first specialist Technology Colleges. Similarly no mention was made of the additional category of *Stakeholder Support*.

## Case Study 6

Case Study 6 is a boys' grammar school for pupils aged 11 – 18 with girls in the sixth form. Situated on the northern edge of G, it is a Beacon School and has been a Language College since September 2000. There are 758 pupils on roll, with 208 in the sixth form, of which 33 are girls. The school selects its pupils by ability on entry both to Year 7 and to the sixth form, and attainment on entry is well above average in relation to other schools nationally. The most recent Ofsted was a while back in 2001, but it has appeared twice on HMCI's list of outstanding schools and it retains its excellent reputation. The school is recognised for very high standards and outcomes and the Ofsted report notes that this is joined by high levels of achievement.

All pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. The headteacher, teachers and all other staff have created a climate of good relationships and behaviour in which pupils have the confidence to achieve well. The school provides very good value for money. (Ofsted 2001:8)

A forty minute interview took place with the Head, IK, on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006. He has had a long association with the school as he was appointed Deputy Head in 1988. He has been Head for twelve years. The Ofsted report reflected well on the quality of his leadership.

The headteacher provides very good leadership. He is clear about the direction of the school and his authority is widely respected. He has been keen to maintain the traditional values of the grammar school, while moving the school forward and embracing new ideas and approaches. The school is confident in its successes, but is never complacent.

The headteacher's approach to leadership has successfully gained the full support and co-operation of the staff. (Ofsted 2001:19).

In the interview, IK gave a very strong impression that he was concerned with the 'brand' of this high performing and successful school. This relates to a specific area of what Collins would describe as the *Hedgehog Concept*. In his

monograph on the Social Sectors (Collins 2005), he identified a 'resource engine' for not-for-profit organisations which included the building up of the brand.

'Seeking and achieving national recognition, although at the time it seemed like just collecting logos, it has been important.'

'.... If you want to come here, we are an academic institution, we are expecting you to work.'

The second strongest frequency of codes was shared by the key concepts *Fly Wheel and Doom Loop* and *Level 5 Leadership*. He repeatedly gave references which could be interpreted in the building up of the *Fly Wheel*.

'it has been a case of building on success, and gradual improvement.'

'There wasn't a transition (it was a) gradual progress.'

Similarly he described himself as 'cynical' and needing to protect the school from the *Doom Loop* of endless government initiatives.

'My role is to protect my staff from the powers that be, more and more initiatives from on high from people who are not even teachers.'

The aspect of *Level 5 Leadership* which came across most strongly was that of personal humility. According to Collins, a level 5 leader is likely to ascribe success to luck rather than to boast about their own efforts.

'I have been dead lucky in having a pretty strong school when I arrived, so I didn't have to do any major upheavals. It was popular, results were OK, not been a major problem.'

The other Key Concept which was clear from IK's responses was that of *First Who then What*. It was evident from what IK said that this was an important

aspect for an outstanding school and he also gave an indication of the rigour involved in key appointments.

‘Good appointments are clearly important, if I get absolutely perfect staff I would be out of a job.’

‘When appointing deputies I have actually gone to see them in their schools, before drawing up a short list.’

IK also made passing references to the Key Concepts *Culture of Discipline* and *Confront the Brutal Facts* – the former in describing the discipline of maintaining the school brand (the link with the *Hedgehog Concept*) and the latter through recognising the cause of resistance to change in the school and the need sometimes to have a ‘red flag’ and to modify the path of progress. He also described the role of a particular piece of technology (*Technology Accelerator*), the interactive whiteboard and noted how important it was that it fitted with the aims of the school. He also mentioned the *Stakeholder Support* of the Governing Body.

## Case Study 7

Case Study 7 is a large, mixed comprehensive school with a large sixth form centre. The school was designated a specialist school in mathematics and computing in 2003, and, as a training school, leads the teacher education programme in the county. The attainment of students on entry to the school is around the national average. In its last inspection in 2006, it was deemed outstanding by Ofsted and was subsequently included in HMCI’s list of outstanding schools and is therefore an appropriate choice for this purposive sample.

... is an outstanding school and offers very good value for money. The school knows itself well and through careful consultation with parents, students and other partners has a clear idea of its strengths and what it needs to do to improve. (Ofsted 2006:2)

A fifty minute interview took place with the Head, LM, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006. The responses were clear but complex in terms of coding, in that single statements could often be attributed more than one code. The coding for this interview has been considered and reconsidered more often than any other. LM has been Head for 22 years and his outstanding leadership was also recognised by Ofsted.

The school's leadership is outstanding and is successfully devolved to subject level. Leaders have secured significant improvements since the last inspection. The school has good capacity for further improvement. (Ofsted 2006:2)

LM's responses gave more which could be coded as *Level 5 Leadership* than any other interview. Both *professional will* and *personal humility* were evident in what he said.

'There is consultation but I am not afraid to make ultimate decision.'

The Ofsted citation on leadership at the school did not just cover the Head – this along with what LM had to say about heads of departments (HODs) relates well to Collins' notion of *legislative leadership*.

'I believe the critical people you have to get on board are the middle managers. You get your HODs with you, you are in business. That is where this school succeeds, we have fantastic quality of middle manager, and the line managers ensuring that works. I don't believe a senior team in a school as big as this can do it on their own.'

LM was also clear that part of his responsibility as a leader was the sustainability of the school and the need to plan for succession.



‘... responsibility to prepare the school for transition from me to someone else, responsibility to give the new person coming in the chance to look and see without feeling they have to do things too quickly.’

LM was keen to place at the top of his list of priorities the need to address the quality of Teaching and Learning (T and L) in the school. This was what Collins might describe as his *Hedgehog Concept*.

‘T & L emphasis, which is what a school is all about’

Ofsted too recognised this school priority and noted the quality achieved from making it the simple central organising idea.

Teaching and learning are outstanding and, as a result, students are making very good progress and achieving well. Students have a positive attitude to learning and behaviour is excellent. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of their subjects and prepare lessons very thoroughly. (Ofsted 2006:6)

The ambition for the school to be the best relates both to the *Hedgehog Concept* and *Level 5 Leadership*. The school had to be clear what the best looks like:

‘Ensure that you are constantly looking outside, that if you want what you believe to be best for kids, that you know what is the best, not just what you think is, because if it is just what you think you can be operating a couple of points below what is best. Send your people to see what it looks like, see what they do differently.’

LM underlined the importance of the development of teaching and learning at the school by placing one of his best people to lead the process. This relates to the Key Concept *First Who then What*. He also spoke of the rigour involved in the selection process.

‘So any HOD we appoint we send out to see people in their own school to see them teach, if they can’t teach in own school, then they definitely can’t do it here.’

In spite of this rigour, the importance of hiring somebody who fits in with the culture was important and LM spoke of a couple of times when the quality of teaching of a candidate in their own school was very convincing, but their ‘fit’ in the local culture was more problematic.

‘On two occasions, we went for somebody who we thought, having seen them in own school, were good practitioners, at interview we thought there were others who were more of our culture, but we went for the practitioner, which was a mistake, they didn’t have the relationship with the kids.’

LM was also clear that when a people change was needed, he was prepared to act. This link between the *Hedgehog Concept*, and getting the right person for the culture was underlined by LM’s description of a *Culture of Discipline*, which emphasised the flow of disciplined *people thought and action*. It was also apparent that developments were allowed to grow through a *culture of entrepreneurship* and not from *tyrannical* direction.

‘Second thing, to ensure that you take fear out of the place, classroom observation is about unleashing the potential of people, allowing them to become better, allowing them to enjoy being better, and not about beating them for not being good enough.’

The notion of building momentum through the gradual turning of the *Fly Wheel* was also evident in LM’s story.

‘We have to change the emphasis, to get the young people to work with us, and not see is at ‘us and them’. The cultural change took 4 – 5 years, but that change is fundamental to what we have now.’

‘I believe that is the flaw with the super head, they can change school quickly but that is because that school is rock bottom, but to sustain a change in culture takes years, I don’t believe you can change the culture of a school before 5 years, more than likely between 5 and 7.’

The understanding of the distinction between saving a poor school and improving a good school was further developed through a process which Collins would term *Confront the Brutal Facts*. Again this links very strongly with the other key concepts understood in this case study – the need to build a strong team around the central idea and a culture which is understood throughout the organisation.

‘I think the key to moving a school from good to very good, and very good to outstanding is the hardest job of all and the only way of doing it is knowing yourself exceptionally well and being exceptionally honest with yourself and basically road testing what you think, rigorously and honestly.’

‘In once sense that is the hard part, because there are so many facets to a school, you won’t get everything to an outstanding level, but it deciding which are the key areas and the only way to do this is knowing the school exceptionally well.’

LM did make reference to the *Stakeholder Support* of governors and parents but did not speak of the need for *Technology Accelerators*.

## Case Study 8

Case Study 8 is a popular, oversubscribed school for pupils aged 11 to 18, located on a pleasant site in C. It has almost 1,300 pupils, of whom about 280 are in the sixth form. Most pupils are of White British heritage, with only a very small number from minority ethnic groups. The majority of pupils come from fairly affluent backgrounds. The school has specialist technology status. The last Ofsted inspection at Case Study 8 was in October 2005 and as a result, the school was included in HMCI List of Outstanding Schools, making it appropriate for inclusion in the purposive sample.

... is an extremely effective school. Through excellent leadership and management, the school was improved considerably since its last inspection. Pupils of all abilities make excellent progress and standards are very high at all stages and across almost all subject areas.

(Ofsted 2005:2)

The Head, CH, has been in post for almost eleven years, and this is his second headship. A forty minute interview took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006. His responses in the interview focussed on relatively few of Collins' Key Concepts, but one of his main messages could be interpreted as *First Who then What*.

'We place an enormous emphasis on recruitment'

At the beginning of CH's Headship, the school was only 11-16. Through reviewing the curriculum offer and expanding the school with a sixth form, CH created the opportunities to enhance the quality of the teaching staff.

'We rationalised the staffing according to the curriculum we wanted to offer, that meant that some of the weaker teachers who were working on part time contracts were no longer needed. It was a fairly simple straightforward process to carry out that reduction.'

The rigour with which appointments were made meant that CH was particularly disappointed if they did not work out.

‘We have made one or two appointments which have not been as successful as you would have wanted them to be, they are bitter blows, when you have the opportunity to improve things, or solve problems and you make an appointment which you pin your hopes on and it doesn’t work out. A set back.’

*Level 5 Leadership* was also apparent in some of CH’s answers. He rated the raising of expectations as the most important aspect of improving the school.

‘Firstly, higher expectations, I think there had been a tendency just to accept things as they were to some extent.’

This professional will – a resolve to settle for nothing other than the highest standards was also recognised in the Ofsted report.

The school’s self evaluation is analytical and rigorous. In a few cases, though, it is modest. This is largely due to the relentless drive by the headteacher to keep improving. (Ofsted 2005:2)

The other side of *Level 5 Leadership* was also apparent in that he showed personal humility when telling of his own impact on the school.

‘I think the biggest thing is that staff were eager to be led, they weren’t resistant at all, they were keen to take up new ideas.’

This strong resolve coupled with the rigour of appointments meant that CH was able to develop a *Culture of Discipline* at the school.

‘they were given very clear indications of what was acceptable and what wasn’t, so there was a better climate established’

Again this was also picked up in the Ofsted inspection report.

... thrives on continual improvement. Throughout the school, the headteacher's philosophy of striving to improve in all areas has been wholeheartedly adopted. (Ofsted 2005:5)

When asked for a 'vignette' to characterise this change in culture he described a scenario which suggested *disciplined people thought and action*.

'Quirky one, we started at 8.55am and the early comers used to be here for 8.30am. These days its really difficult to get a place in the car park after 8.15am. It is a graphic illustration of the change in mood.'

CH described the layers of consistency required to progress the school and the time required to build this up (*Fly Wheel and Doom Loop*). As it was his second headship he was also clear that there was a 'window' when this was easier.

'Whatever you do has to be good, you have this window of opportunity. Important to make the right decision, and the things that you decide to focus on you genuinely believe in yourself, but also you know they are going to be successful.'

He made passing reference to the school's central idea (*Hedgehog Concept*) of continuing improvements and was particularly clear about the resource required to transform the school. He also mentioned an example of the need to *Confront the Brutal Facts*. He made no references that could be interpreted with the codes of *Stakeholder Support* or *Technology Accelerators*.

## Case Study 9

Case Study 9 is a large specialist science school on the north-western side of C. It is the largest school in the county. As a large comprehensive serving the town and a wide rural catchment, the full range of abilities and a broad range of social and economic backgrounds are represented. The school was identified in

Ofsted's 'roll of honour' as one of relatively few schools to have been twice deemed particularly successful through inspection, in January 2005. It was therefore selected for the purposive sample. It was a Beacon School from 2001 until the end of that designation in 2004. The most recent Ofsted inspection was in 2005 and the report praised the school.

... is a very good school, with many outstanding features. The students achieve very well, because of the high quality of the education they receive. Students' personal development is excellent, because of the opportunities they are given to think carefully on a range of issues and to take responsibility. The school has high expectations of its students, and they acquire very good skills to help them learn very well. The school gives very good value for money. (Ofsted 2005:5)

A forty five minute interview took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006 with TC, who was Head of the school from January 1997 until his retirement in April 2004. Ofsted similarly recognised the progress of the school during the period that TC was Head.

The school has made very good improvement since its last inspection in 1999. It has done very well to maintain the high standards identified during that inspection, and the quality of teaching and learning has strengthened considerably. (Ofsted 2005:5)

The factor which TC saw as most important in progressing the school from an already high standard was understood as relating to Collins key concept of *First Who then What*.

'First would be the quality of the staff. I inherited a good staff and was fortunate to make some good appointments.'

Many of TC's comments resonated with an interaction between Collins' Key Concepts – the statement above could also relate to the *personal humility* of *Level 5 Leadership* and the quotation below, referring the character traits

appropriate to the organisation was coded as relating to *First Who then What* but also connects with the establishment of a *Culture of Discipline*.

‘.... a phrase I heard before I started, ‘the S... Way’. That meant something, a collegiality, a belief in what the school could achieve’

In describing the acquisition of science specialist status, he told of a story of success of a young Head of Science and related how he placed his *best person on the biggest opportunity*.

‘uncovering that star quality, encouraging it and letting it grow.’

*Level 5 leadership* was also apparent in the professional resolve for high standards and the need for continued improvement.

‘These linked into the next factor, which would be high expectations. I am a great believer in comprehensive education: that it can succeed and should succeed.’

‘If you are going to keep on improving, you have to look to improve, no complacency, this school is capable of improvement, the children can do better, more of the children could do better. Keep reviewing what you’re doing, looking to next project, what you’re doing next to move forward’

The determination for and celebration of high standards was the single organising idea which influenced the school and became its *Hedgehog Concept*.

‘High expectation is something which is the part of the climate of the school, and therefore not identifiable at any single event, but part of the fabric.’ (Ofsted 2005:5)

‘the message was always the same, to broadcast achievement, to celebrate achievement. Anything any child had done that was worth mentioning, or that a team had done. Broadcast it, celebrate it, clap them. Also,



remind them of the standards, here are our expectations. Also through the regular newsletter to parents, hammer home the key messages. All these things relate to high expectations.'

Not surprisingly then, these aspirations became established as a central part of the school's *Culture of Discipline*.

'Fifth, good continuous quality of improvement. A constant attempt to see if we could raise standards further. I initiated a need to keep reviewing classroom practice, this had been done before but not systematically. We had a big focus each term, where we would review some aspect of T & L, which we would review by classroom observation, holding inset sessions, inviting in outside speakers to train staff. We were constantly looking at ways to improve classroom practice to help get the best out of the children.'

The fact that this approach was consistently applied year after year also related well to the concept of the *Fly Wheel*.

'That was the approach we took, year by year looking at different aspects of classroom practice, examining them, observing them, reviewing them, then spreading through whole school, making them part of the S... practice.'

Whilst this consistency and alignment was important in moving the school forwards, the school did not ignore those aspects which needed revising or removing in order to progress. In doing so the school had to *Confront the Brutal Facts*.

'You learn from experience and you adapt as you go along.'

TC did make reference to the *Stakeholder Support* of both governors and parents but made no comments which could be related to the key concept of *Technology Accelerators*.

## Case Study 10

Case Study 10 is a smaller than average comprehensive school which has had technology status since 1999 and is also a Leading Edge school. It serves a rural area in the Forest of Dean. The attainment of the students on entry is broadly average. The proportion of students requiring free school meals is low. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none have English as an additional language. The number of students with a statement of special educational needs is about average. The most recent Ofsted inspection was in March 2006. In a rather different style of Ofsted report, the reporting inspection chose to quote a parent at the top of the report to summarise judgements.

*'It is a brilliant school with brilliant staff. They look at each child as an individual and work towards that individual achieving their full potential at whatever level they may be. No-one falls by the wayside.'*

Inspectors agree with this very accurate assessment written by a parent, responding to the questionnaire sent out by the school for the inspection. But what are students' views? An inspector asked a group of students if they would rather stay at home to do as they pleased or come to.... There was a pause. 'Come to school', said one, 'Definitely', another chimed in, 'It's just enjoyable, there's always something to look forward to', said another and so it went on.

Another parent wrote that 'the school always seems to be trying new things and introducing new ideas in order to keep improving'. She is right. The school is not resting on its laurels and is keen to improve even further its overall standards at GCSE and increase the numbers of students achieving the highest grades in all subjects. With the unique ethos created by the staff and students of this school and their collective understanding of learning, it is well placed to improve still further. (Ofsted 2006:2)

The present Head joined the school as a Deputy in 2001 and was appointed to the Headship in January 2006. The previous Head had also been a deputy at the school. Ofsted recognised this sense of direction which is implicit in the succession planning.

There is a unity of purpose about the school and a clear strategic direction shared by all staff. At the heart of this school's success is the continuous professional development of all staff for the benefit of all students. (Ofsted 2006:3)

A forty five minute interview took place with the Head, RB, on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006 – he too recognised the strength of continuity in succession planning. This relates well to one aspect of *Level 5 Leadership* where a *Great* organisation cultivates leaders from the inside.

‘That has been fantastic in terms of the school, a succession plan and continuity and continue down path of development.’

RB also recognised another feature of the school, which Collins would ascribe to *Level 5 Leadership* in the *Social Sectors*, that of *Legislative Leadership* – rather than top down management.

‘We don't have top down models, but management and leadership is bottom up and the support comes from us, at the end of the day, given everything that we are doing, there is no possible way that the leadership team can have a finger in every pie, you support, you guide, you keep your finger on the pulse, but it is the staff that drive that change.’

RB was clear about what might be called the school's *Hedgehog Concept*. A focus on Teaching and Learning and the desire to improve kept recurring as themes throughout RB's story.

‘Absolute focus on T & L, because with that and the inevitable crossing over into other aspects, so where you have that high quality T & L, you are reducing issues regarding behaviour and so on, impact on staff.’

‘ You have to come back to T & L, at the heart of it, that is the thing we do day in, day out and trying to do the best we can, each lesson, every day. Couple to that desire to improve – that has to be key, so many things hang off that, if you don’t get that right, if you don’t create the opportunities for the kids.’

This single organising idea is what other aspects are based upon – the *Culture of Discipline* at the school was described through a responsibility to others – a culture which was modelled to and encompassed the students.

‘Ethos of the school is hugely important, the environment you come into, very difficult to describe what it was, but if you walk around the school you can feel it, talk to students, you get a sense of being part of community, responsibility to each other. We have three watchwords: care, courtesy and commitment. Care to ourselves, commitment to ourselves and others. These pervade everything we do and the students respond to that.’

The fundamental notion of continual improvement of teaching and learning also requires teachers at the school to *Confront the Brutal Facts*, in that they ask the students to rate them.

‘It always amazes me that staff tend to go for the classes they have greater difficulty with rather than top sets, and they get on famously. But that is the level of care and the value they put on what students have to say’

‘It is the openness that exists and the trust, the leadership of the school allows them to take risks, we give them that safety net as well. We say you jump, and we will catch you if your parachute doesn’t open.’

This element of trust and a lack of blame when things don't go as planned relates back to the school's culture.

'you trust your staff and give them the opportunity to go out and experiment and if it goes wrong, you catch them and you stand them on their feet and tell them to get on with it. You don't create a culture of blame; you have to trust your staff.'

RB was also keen to mention the use of ICT as a *Technology Accelerator*.

'I also wouldn't want to discount the role of ICT in the development of school in terms of its ability to drive forwards and create innovation in the school.'

In the interview references were also made to consistency and alignment that could be coded to the key concept of the Fly Wheel. RB also talked about the qualities of a *DM Person* which could be interpreted as *First Who then What*. He made no comments which were understood in the category of *Stakeholder Support*.

## Interview Scoring Question

There was a quasi-quantitative question in the interview schedule, where the heads were asked to score (out of one hundred) their 'top five' elements leading to success. The interviewees were confident in identifying factors which led to the success of their schools but it was evident from the body language of the heads that they were less comfortable when asked to rank the elements. Indeed some did not score every factor and one head chose not to quantify those aspects at all. The heads were free to express these factors in any way which was appropriate to their own context and as an alternative comparison I have chosen

to interpret them by grouping a number of expressions into the themes which emerged from their responses:

- Appointing and Developing Staff
- Teaching and Learning
- Discipline
- Leadership
- Broad Education
- High Expectations
- Improved Resources

The 'scores' do not represent any absolute scale but give an indication of the relative importance ascribed by the headteachers interviewed.

The theme which emerged most strongly was that of **Appointing and Developing Staff** [6/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 10 and 55 out of 100 with a total of 195]. The language used by the various heads ranged from 'appointments and developments' by PL (who scored 30 and 25 respectively); to finding a 'strong Senior Management Team' for IK (30); 'staffing' JP (50); 'Pastoral appointments' for LM (20); 'developments' TC (10); and Continuing Professional Development RB (10). These references were mainly coded to *First Who then What* in the other analyses although when 'unpacked' in the interviews there was also a relationship to a *Culture of Discipline* and *Level 5 Leadership*. Whilst the heads scored this area most highly, they tended to speak more about leadership in the course of their stories.

Getting **Teaching and Learning** right was a theme that appeared most clearly and often expressed in exactly those terms. [5/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 20 and 35 out of 100 with a total of 155] LM (35), RB (25) and TC (25) identified teaching and learning and it was qualified by RK (20) as needing to be stimulating and by CH (50) accompanied by high expectations. For many of the heads interviewed – this was the core purpose of

the job of the school and getting it right related well to the notion of a *Hedgehog Concept*.

A theme which encompassed various aspects of **Discipline** featured at a similar level to the previous area. [8/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 10 and 30 out of 100 with a total of 155]. The concept of discipline in a school context is, perhaps, broader than that described by Collins in the business setting, and so some heads focussed on the discipline of the students: LM (25) and CH (20) along with pastoral care. Other heads presented a view of discipline within the staff team: AM (20) spoke of clear accountability; JP (20+10) of self review and performance management; PL (20) of departmental audits; RK (20) of monitoring procedures and RB (20) of ethos. The connection to Collins' *Culture of Discipline* is obvious but the detail revealed links with the need to *Confront the Brutal Facts*, the discipline of pushing against the *Flywheel* and also to the *Level 5 Leadership* required to establish such a culture.

Whilst the coding revealed that most references were attributed to the area of Level 5 Leadership, the heads did not rank elements of **Leadership** as highly or as clearly as the themes noted above. [6/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 10 and 50 out of 100 with a total of 140]. AM (25+25) identified 'direction and consistency'; TC (30) talked about 'collegiality and teamwork'; RB (25) described 'strategic leadership'; RK (15) the importance of 'maintaining staff morale'; for LM (10) it was 'widening the SMT and working with governors' and for JP (10) it involved enlisting the 'support of parents'. The fact that the leadership of the individual being interviewed was not 'rated' by the heads themselves is an indication of the *personal humility* which Collins identifies with *Level 5 Leadership*. The coding revealed the true extent to which the heads referred to the importance of leadership in their stories and indicates very clearly the high level of professional resolve required to move a school forward. The collegial nature described and the range of stakeholders mentioned also reflects the notion of *legislative leadership* which Collins recognises in the Social Sectors. Relationships to *Flywheel* – through the need for consistency and

direction and the context of a *Culture of Discipline* and the clear focus of the *Hedgehog Concept* are also apparent here.

A number of heads spoke of the need to create a **Broad Education** for the students in their care [6/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 10 and 40 out of 100 with a total of 125]. RK (30) 'coined' the term whilst IK (10+30) talked of the importance of inducting new pupils and developing the sixth form. CH (20) identified an early review of the curriculum as an important measure, TC (15) placed education in the context of the school community and RB (20) was an advocate for 'student voice'. For some heads, this was their *Hedgehog Concept*, for many a reflection of their values and vocation, or the direction of their *Flywheel*.

A theme of raising aspirations and **High Expectations** also emerged from the scoring process. [4/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 10 and 50 out of 100 with a total of 100]. PL (20) – 'raising aspirations' and CH (50) and TC (20) 'high expectations' gave views which are central to this theme. IK (10) also identified the importance of drawing recognition to the quality of the school through national awards. There is a connection with the *professional resolve* required of *Level 5 Leadership* but also to the notion of a *brand* expressed through the *resource engine* of Collins' *Hedgehog Concept*.

For some of the heads a theme of **Improved Resources** was rated. [3/10 heads identified factors within this theme, scoring between 5 and 20 out of 100 with a total of 35]. IK (20) spoke of the importance of 'physical investment'; CH (10) 'investment and improved environment' and PL (5) improved resources. Other heads took up this idea in their stories and a connection to the notion of a *resource engine* and the building of a *brand* may be noted and some mentioned the role of *technology* in *accelerating* progress in the school.

These rankings broadly reflect the references coded throughout the interview to Collins' Key Concepts, although where there were major differences, these are considered above. By the use of interviews it was possible to 'unpack' these



themes and ratings in a way which not have been possible by questionnaire. The rankings were illuminated by and supported the references coded throughout the interviews.

## Case Comparisons

In comparing the cases, each of the Key Concepts from Collins' *Good to Great* (and the additional theme which arose from the present study) are considered in turn and in the order of the frequency to which references were coded to those areas.

### Level 5 Leadership

Looking at the profile of the Key Concepts from the original Collins research, not surprisingly, given that the data was derived from interviews with school leaders, the category to which most references were attributed to through the coding process was *Level 5 Leadership*. 84 references were so coded or 24% of the total. 10/10 Headteachers made between 4 and 17 references coded to *Level 5 Leadership*. The frequency of references to this category was at least a third higher than to any other area.

The most common sub-code was that of *legislative leadership* [20 references; 7/10 respondents] – perhaps indicative of the type of role a headteacher has – not absolute power as may be more probable in a business setting but in an environment where leadership is likely to be distributed and authority is drawn from influencing stakeholders and *getting people to follow when they have the freedom not to*.

'Part of the trick is to get people to understand the problem. I look sometimes when I see a problem, that is underlying a problem, and see a particular incident which doesn't appear attached at all, I can see it is symptomatic of a much bigger problem, which needs dealing with. So that is another aspect. It is quite complicated. You have that instinct. I was talking to the SLT about their role on the leadership team about how do we

get professional standards shared across the school? It's the headteacher's responsibility. No, it's not. It is the Senior Leadership Team's, no, it is all our responsibility to do it.' GB

'what I have to do is release the potential of others, to make sure they do that, that is my middle managers, my senior leaders and classroom teachers... I give everybody the tools to do the job' LM

18 references; 9/10 respondents indicated that having *high standards and settling for nothing less* was an important element for these headteachers.

'nothing would annoy me more than when I talk to teachers and they would say things like, 'what can you expect from the children here'. I was always intensely annoyed because the children have the same capability, no matter where they are. They are all human beings with the same sort of background. I think that is our job to achieve that potential with them and for them' TC

'High expectations is something which is the part of the climate of the school, and therefore not identifiable at any single event, but part of the fabric. I tried to make sure it was there, particularly in all forms of communication, so assemblies, very important aspect of school life' TC

The other aspect of professional will which was recorded was *resolve to do what must be done* and there were 12 references; 5/10 respondents for this.

'I think you have to be brave, I see a lot of people who are just nervous about it. I am not worried about it. You need that bit of something inside you, not be satisfied with things that aren't good, or very, very good' GB

'There is consultation but I am not afraid to make ultimate decision' LM

The other side of *Level 5 Leadership* is that of *personal humility* which was also expressed although less strongly with 7 references; 6/10 respondents recognising

the need to *act with quiet determination* and 9 references; 3/10 respondents identified the idea of the *window and the mirror*.

‘I think the head plays a critical role, that the Head’s attitude is going to be almost ‘a make or break’. My own feeling is that as Head you have got to be seen to be involved, you have to be seen to be positive, I think you have got to be seen to be calm and measured in the way you deal with things. You have got to be seen to make big efforts to understand the culture of the school and to build organically from that, nothing is more conducive to bad morale than what is seen as random decisions, or you just can’t come in and make changes, you have got to put yourself about a lot.’ RK

The longest serving heads made a greater number of references coded to *Level 5 Leadership*, indicating the importance of this Key Concept. Those heads who were promoted within their own schools made fewest references to *Level 5 Leadership* – but only two of these four noted the importance of succession planning whilst a further two references came from the two most experienced heads.

## Culture of Discipline

The most popular Key Concept in the ‘second rank’ was *Culture of Discipline*. 55 references were so coded or 16% of the total. 10/10 Headteachers made between 3 and 8 references coded to *Culture of Discipline*. Only 5 sub-codes had been identified for this Key Concept and one of these - *disciplined people>thought>action* had 25 references [10/10 respondents] – the greatest number for any sub-code of any Key Concept. It may well be that in this study there was a broader interpretation of cultural discipline than in the original Collins’ study as the nature of ‘discipline’ has a very specific context in a secondary school and it would appear from the responses that to move a school from *Good to Great* it is important that the culture of discipline for students contributes positively to the overall culture of the community.

'I quickly realised that the thing I needed to do most was to change the disciplinary culture of the place. The culture was based on what a minority demanded and when I walked around, there were groups and gangs and I didn't like the feel. I decided with the Senior Team that we would change the discipline, and the discipline would be what the minority required would be for the minority, but what the majority needed would be the school discipline' LM

The disciplined thoughts and actions of those who worked in the schools were also important and here we may find greater resonance with the businesses in the Collins' study.

'Ethos of the school is hugely important, the environment you come into, very difficult to describe what it was, but if you walk around the school you can feel it, talk to student, you get sense of being part of community, responsibility to each other.' RB

There were 9 references; 8/10 respondents coded to indicate that the culture was created through many disciplined people and not a tyrannical leader which relates well to the strong showing of references to *legislative leadership* noted earlier.

'we have high standards, we have high expectations, but we want a friendly relaxed atmosphere, people can say what they like, all ideas are taken seriously, that atmosphere which deliberately sets out to say, we come to school to do a job, but we want to enjoy it at the same time. The head, or the head's attitude improves the ethos of the school.' RK

The substance of this Key Concept is enhanced in the way it relates to others – similarly there were 9 references; 7/10 respondents which recognised the importance of a discipline which focussed on the *Hedgehog Concept* of the institution. The sub-code which recorded an *ethic of entrepreneurship* was strongest in the only independent school in the sample.

## Hedgehog Concept

The Key Concept with the next greatest number of references was the *Hedgehog Concept*. 52 references were so coded or 15% of the total. 10/10 Headteachers made between 2 and 9 references coded to the *Hedgehog Concept*. There were 19 references; 6/10 respondents coded to the *simple organising idea* – these ranged from the most popular which was the quality of teaching and learning to raising expectations; a sense of family and mutual support; a broad educational culture; consistency and meeting the needs of all pupils. This strong coalescence of central themes in the heads' stories gives an indication of how these successful leaders moved their schools from *Good to Great*.

Another sub-code of the *Hedgehog Concept* which figured highly is related to an element raised by Collins in his later book about the Social Sector – the notion of a *resource engine* – made up of *time, money and brand*. The relationship between money and brand seems particularly appropriate to the English school context in a couple of ways. Firstly, because school funding is based on a per capita formula – if a school is in a position to expand and attract additional students, it will receive enhanced funding. One head described how he was able to build the *resource engine* by opening a sixth form at the school, another by increasing sixth form numbers five-fold. – It was the quality of the 'brand' which attracted additional students in each case. Secondly, the award of specialist status not only added to the distinctive character of each school and therefore the 'brand' it also triggered considerable extra recurrent funding. Some of the schools sought to strengthen the 'brand' further by acquiring further forms of national award or becoming centres of excellence.

'Seeking and achieving national recognition, although at the time it seemed just collecting logos, it has been important, we started with Beacon School status, that was tough to persuade staff and governors that we should go for this, but that broke the ground, hence from that language college, achievement awards, science college' IK

Other significant areas of this Key Concept are from references to what the heads were passionate about [5 references; 2/10 respondents] and their understanding of how by instilling this passion into practice [7 references; 4/10 respondents] it had become the *Hedgehog Concept* of the school.

## Confront the Brutal Facts

The Key Concept which recorded the next highest number of references was *Confront the Brutal Facts*. 47 references were so coded or 11% of the total. 10/10 Headteachers made between 1 and 11 references coded to *Confront the Brutal Facts*.

The sub-code which figured most in the coding process was that which recorded where the heads spoke of creating a *climate where the truth is heard* [12 references; 5/10 respondents]. This, in turn, was qualified by 3 lower level codes which indicated how this was achieved through:

- *dialogue and debate, not coercion* [6 references; 4/10 respondents];
- *autopsies without blame* [5 references; 3/10 respondents];
- and *leading with questions not answers* [4 references; 3/10 respondents].

‘It is the openness that exists and the trust, the leadership of the school allows them to take risks, we give them that safety net as well. We say you jump, and we will catch you if your parachute doesn’t open.’ RB

This climate of truth was most important to the Head newest to the role, who had been promoted from within the school.

The other aspect of this Key Concept was also represented in the stories of the Heads – that of *keeping faith* (which Collins calls the ‘Stockdale Paradox’) 8 references; 7/10 respondents were recorded for *facts better than dreams*.

‘Recognition that 6 years ago we were doing well in our results but we felt we had almost reached a plateau...it was how to push that extra little step further, once you get to a point there is a danger... and you have to do a bit

more to get it beyond the plateau, but a realistic recognition that given the intake of the school, there was a limit to how much we could improve.' JP

7 references; 5/10 respondents were recorded for *keeping faith*.

You have got to take the staff with you – but there was an element – if we had listened to some, we wouldn't have gone forward. JP

There were also 5 references; 4/10 respondents which related to the need for *red flag mechanisms* when information must not be ignored.

'Great example of adaptation - regarding the insisting on seating plan. When we first tried the pilot, showing that it worked. One thing that came up was that the Science Department said that 'it doesn't work for us', 'it doesn't help to have boy/girl'. We asked 'why not?' 'why should you be the exception?' They said that if you carry out practical work with the children, and you have a boy and a girl in pairs, the boy does setting up and the practical work and the girl writes it down. Very stereotypical role play, which is just the thing you are trying to avoid. So into the policy goes, 'except in science'. You learn from experience and you adapt as you go along.' TC

## First Who then What

The Key Concept of *First Who then What* featured highly when the Heads rated their 'change factors' although in their stories 46 references were so coded or 13% of the total. 9/10 Headteachers made between 2 and 11 references coded to *First Who then What*. The sub-code which attracted the most references was that which claims that the *right person* for an institution is more to do with character traits than innate capability [18 references; 7/10 respondents].

'staff talk about being a D M person, and understanding what that means and I think that any teacher coming in buys into the ethos of the school,

rather, I am going to stamp my personality on the school, you need to come in and buy into what it is' RB

11 references; 6/10 respondents noted the importance of *sheer rigour* in selection processes.

'When appointing deputies I have actually gone to see them in their schools, before drawing up short list. I feel I have been lucky, but I have worked hard at it and I feel I have made good appointments' IK

Some of the more experienced Heads spoke about the problems of getting recruitment wrong:

'no matter what I tried I couldn't get right personnel and it went from bad to worse, until now and we got rid of whole department last summer, and it is now working. Strangely enough I got caught out by not following my gut instinct.' LM

'We have made one or two appointments which have not been as successful as you would have wanted them to be, they are bitter blows, when you have the opportunity to improve things, or solve problem and you make an appointment which you pin your hopes on and it doesn't work out. A setback.' CH

10 references; 5/10 respondents related to the prospect of putting the *best people on the best opportunities and not the biggest problems.*

'A brand new Head of Science, who was only 30 years old, and only just appointed as a promising head of Science, found herself in the spotlight, 'you have got to help lead this initiative forward'. She responded to that and led this working party forward, helped me to forge community links, to contact primary schools. The response from staff, to people like her, uncovering that star quality, encouraging it and letting it grow. That



identifies the quality of the school; appointing good staff who are encouraged to grow, to give back to the school.' TC

There were 7 references; 5/10 respondents on taking action when a *people change* was required. Interestingly these references were made by the five most experienced Heads and the two Heads on their second headship made two references coded to this area. The one Head who had no references coded to this area worked in one of the highest achieving schools in the country, with a very stable staff team and relatively few opportunities for recruitment.

### Fly Wheel and Doom Loop

39 references or 11% of the total were coded to this Key Concept. 10/10 Headteachers made between 1 and 8 references coded to the *Fly Wheel and Doom Loop*. The notion of a build up was recognised with 14 references; 9/10 respondents noting the need for *consistency and coherence*. Indeed one very experienced Head thought that consistency was the key to creating an outstanding school.

'That is what outstanding is to me, consistency in our level of performance, rather than a one-off outstanding thing, which schools can have, but the whole thing' GB

'it has been a case of building on success, and gradual improvement' IK

The sub-codes revealed that *alignment* [9 references; 5/10 respondents] to the central vision for the school or, in Collins' terms the *Hedgehog Concept* was an important consideration and provided a filter for proposals. The other model presented in this Key Concept, that of the *Doom Loop* was also recognised in 7 references; 3/10 respondents – where a picture was painted of many new initiatives being introduced from outside and the need to 'test' these against school priorities.

'When I first started job, I was aware that I had to be very careful not to have too many initiatives, beware of initiative overload, staff, parents,

pupils can only take so many initiatives at one time. I learnt that quickly, sadly successive governments have not learnt that and they are still throwing initiatives by the cartload at our profession. We have learnt to slow down the rate of new initiatives.' PL

'All I thought of, I am becoming more and more frustrated that schools are being 'done to'. My role is to protect my staff from the powers that be, more and more initiatives from on high' IK

In 7 references; 4/10 respondents, it was acknowledged that the *view from outside* the school did not always recognise the gradual build up that had taken place internally and that from outside it appeared that the organisation had experienced a *break through*.

'Its part of a total package, not just one thing, but everything, that all contributes towards it.' JP

## Stakeholder Support

The coding area that arose from the pilot study, *Stakeholder Support*, Only 15 references were so coded or 4% of the total. 6/10 Headteachers made between 1 and 4 references coded to *Stakeholder Support*. The support of parents was appreciated in 8 references; 5/10 respondents – more often than the support of governors 6 references; 4/10 respondents, with only 1 mention of the support of pupils. It was the schools with clearly defined communities for whom this appeared to be more important: rural comprehensives or the single independent and faith schools in the sample.

'More importantly, I have felt that I had the support of all of the stakeholder constituencies. In that five year period, I have felt that I have the full support of governors, who expect and allow me to lead, I have the full support of staff as a group, who have felt they were on board and felt consulted, and have supported me. I have felt the full support of the

parents, it is easier to have support of your parents at an independent school, because they have bought into it' PL

It may be, with this relatively low frequency of references that *Stakeholder Support* may be more appropriately considered as a sub-code of another Key Concept. The notion of *legislative leadership* – an important part of *Level 5 Leadership* in the Social Sector may well be an appropriate area to which the support of stakeholders could be re-coded.

## Technology Accelerators

The Key Concept with fewest references attributed was *Technology Accelerators*. This area had just 13 references, or 4% of the total. 5/10 Headteachers made between 1 and 5 references coded to *Technology Accelerators* – a smaller constituency than many of the sub-codes within the other Key Concepts.

References which were made to this aspect linked it to the core business. The fact that there were fewer mentions may be due to the 'subordinate' nature of this element in the original research. The Literature Review for this study notes that this aspect was no longer accorded the status of a Key Concept in Collins' later work on the Social Sectors.

## Key Messages

Looking across the Key Concepts, the following messages emerge from the sub-codes about outstanding schools in this study:

- *Discipline people>thought>action* [25 references; 7%; 10/10 respondents] was an important aspect in bringing about the change from *Good to Great*.
- *Legislative leadership* [20 references; 6%; 10/10 respondents] – recognising the nature of leadership in the school context, and the distribution of power and influence in a public organisation.

- *simplify to single organising idea* [19 references; 6%; 5/10 respondents]
- *Sets high standards and settle for nothing else* [18 references; 5%; 9/10 respondents] – indicates the nature of the expectations and values of the successful school leaders interviewed.
- *right person - more to do with character traits than innate capabilities* [18 references; 5%; 7/10 respondents] The message here appears to be that the right person is often context specific – success in one school does not always mean that a move to a new school will be successful – the context of different jobs in the same institution also needs to be considered.
- *Time, Money, Brand* [19 references; 6%; 9/10 respondents] the *resource engine* identified by Collins in his work on the Social Sector seems to recognise the important elements of time, money and brand for schools in the sample.
- *Consistency and coherence* [14 references; 4%; 9/10 respondents] The Heads interviewed were clear of the importance of the coherence of initiatives and the relationship to the school's *Hedgehog Concept*. Similarly consistency of quality across the school was aspired to as an indicator of greatness.
- *Climate where truth is heard* [12 references; 3%; 5/10 respondents] A culture which promoted honest self evaluation was recognised as a major contributing factor to the success of the schools studied.
- *resolve to do what must be done* [12 references; 3%; 5/10 respondents] Where changes were required to progress the school further – those Heads with the most experience clearly showed the professional will to take action where necessary.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to apply an existing model to a new situation: In this instance to explore the possible relevance of the research of Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great* (2001) to a sample of ten UK schools. This was undertaken in a systematic way: a review of literature; the consideration of an appropriate research methodology; the collection of data through semi-structured interviews; and a presentation and analysis of the findings.

In the review of literature, the first aim was to provide the reader with an insight into the work of Jim Collins and his model for *Good to Great* which was formulated from an extensive study of US businesses. This thesis asks the question as to what extent the *Good to Great* model may provide a framework for some schools in the UK and so the relevance of *Good to Great* was explored in a new context of literature which focused on educational research. The second aim was to explore the level of connectivity between the Collins study and a range of perspectives on school effectiveness and excellence. A third aim was to establish a sound basis for further research – applying the *Good to Great* model in the context of some UK schools.

A multiple-case study approach was taken for the research and the methodology included the analysis of Ofsted reports for schools judged as outstanding. A purposive sample of ten schools was identified for further consideration where the views of school leaders were discovered through semi-structured interviews.

The research activity was recorded through videos and transcripts of interviews which were then coded in relation to the Key Concepts from the Collins' research alongside additional categories which emerged from the interviews. A discussion of findings was then undertaken from a number of different perspectives.

Wolcott (1994:43) states that theory can serve both ‘analytically and interpretively. For interpretation, theory provides a way to link our case studies, invariably modest in scope, with larger issues.’

There is evidence that the ‘Good to Great’ research findings had some relevance to the cases in this study. The heads interviewed referred to many of the Key Concepts although each with a different emphasis. The high density of references which could be coded to six of the seven of the main outcomes from the Collins research suggests that this model makes sense in the context of the schools investigated. It is worthwhile noting that I do not believe any of the heads in the study had read *Good to Great*.

The Key Concept which featured most strongly was *Level 5 Leadership* – although the heads did not rate their leadership as important when asked to quantify different aspects – their stories revealed that they spoke about the importance of the quality of leadership more than anything else. The two facets of *Level 5 Leadership* identified by Collins: professional will and personal humility were both evident in the school leaders interviewed. The notion of *legislative leadership* resonates strongly in these schools, where power is not absolute but is exercised through distributed leadership and the influencing of stakeholders.

*First Who then What* also appears to make sense in the context of many of the schools investigated. It was not possible for any of the heads to build a team from scratch, but they appreciated the opportunities to recruit as early as they could. They expressed the importance of rigour in selection and an appreciation of the need for a match between the person and the organisation. The heads’ professional will was evident in anecdotes of having to take action to make ‘people changes’ and they told uplifting stories of putting their best people on the best opportunities.

*A Culture of Discipline* has an additional dimension in the school context. A number of the heads spoke about the need to address the discipline of the students and the importance of getting the culture right for them. This was

achieved by appropriate rewards and sanctions, through professional will and 'student voice'. They also recognised elements which would be more familiar to the business world – the need to for people to 'pull together' to achieve a central goal, mutual support and responsibility, and personal development.

The notion of the *Hedgehog Concept* – the simple crystalline idea which is the vision for the organisation was apparent in each of the heads' stories and most of them also rated the importance of this clarity of vision. Some of these ideas related to the key purposes of the institutions – the quality of teaching and learning - whilst others represented values – breadth of education, high aspirations and inclusion, and the importance of the individual. It was evident the heads interviewed had a good understanding of the *resource engine* for their school and how to use resources most effectively to achieve their aim. The importance of building a 'brand' in order to attract further resources was also seen to be important.

At points in time illustrated in the heads' stories it was clear that there was an imperative to pause and *Confront the Brutal Facts*. This often occurred early in the headships of the interviewees. They told of the revelations of initial appraisals of position of their schools but also later evaluations of sub sections – departments, individuals, initiatives or situations. The value of *Keeping Faith* was also manifest from heads whose passion for their purpose and whose sense of optimism could be felt strongly during the interviews.

The imagery of Collins' *Flywheel and Doom Loop* is indeed powerful and resonant in the heads' accounts. The gradual build-up and the need for consistency were familiar themes for the interviewees. The heads spoke of taking five to seven years to make a difference and that the journey from *Good to Great* was perhaps the most difficult. No one told of a 'break through moment' – just of the continual efforts to build their vision. Warnings were given about the weight of initiatives descending on the schools from outside without reference to the central thrust and how weaker schools can be sent spiralling off direction.

The element of Collins' work that was not so strongly demonstrated in the heads' accounts is the use of *Technology Accelerators* – an aspect which is 'downplayed' by Collins himself in his later work on *Good to Great in the Social Sectors* (2005). The additional category of *Stakeholder Support* which emerged from the interviews did not achieve the same frequency in the coding process and may be better understood as a subordinate element within the type of leadership exercised. The question which asked heads to quantify the contribution of different elements was of limited use when only considering ten cases but would be more helpful when further cases are added – the meaning of the ranking was not always instantly clear, the context of the interview situation led to a better understanding.

One of the strongest messages which comes across from the study is the interdependence between the Key Concepts from Collins' *Good to Great*. Without the clarity of the *Hedgehog Concept*, there is no reason to push the *Flywheel*. Without the professional will of *Level 5 Leadership*, there is no point in having to *Confront the Brutal Facts*. Without a *Culture of Discipline*, the best people will not have a framework to achieve and the notion of *First Who Then What* will be empty. It would be possible to list many more connections. The process of coding the transcripts and then reconsidering them made these relationships seem even stronger.

The leaders of the outstanding schools in the study appeared to have a number of similar attributes:

They were able to influence and draw support from a range of stakeholders to foster a sharp focus on their core values, about which they were passionate, in order to build an organisational culture strong on self evaluation and with an expectation to achieve the highest standards consistently across the school.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), variation in performance within British Schools is four times greater than variation between schools. This theme of consistency across the school in



moving from *Good to Great* is one which emerged as critical from some of the interviews:

‘I think the key to moving a school from good to very good, and very good to outstanding is the hardest job of all and the only way of doing it is knowing yourself exceptionally well....In one sense that is the hard part, because there are so many facets to a school, you won’t get everything to an outstanding level, but in deciding which are the key areas and the only way to do this is knowing the school exceptionally well.’ (LM)

‘Something we haven’t talked about, it takes a hell of a lot of effort to go from good to outstanding, it doesn’t take a lot to go from satisfactory to good. The step from good to outstanding is hard, because talking about reducing disparity...That is what outstanding is to me, consistency in our level of performance, rather than a one-off outstanding thing, which schools can have, but the whole thing.’ (GB)

In *Good to Great in the Social Sectors* (2005), Collins makes it clear that he believes that ‘Business Thinking is Not the Answer’.

We must reject the idea – well intentioned, but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become ‘more like a business’. Most businesses – like most of anything else in life – fall somewhere between mediocre and good. Few are great. When you compare great companies with good ones, many widely practiced business norms turn out to correlate with mediocrity, not greatness. So why then, would we want to import the practices of mediocrity into the social sectors?

(Collins, 2005:1)

Collins identifies some differences between the business and social sectors ‘through the lens of the good-to-great framework’. He believes that both business and social sector leaders face difficulties and constraints but that relative advantages and disadvantages more or less cancel each other out.

Great business corporations share more in common with great social sector organisations than they share with mediocre businesses. And the same holds in reverse. Again, the key question is not business versus social, but great versus good. (Collins, 2005:30)

For one of the heads interviewed in this study the difference was quite simple:

‘It’s all about stakeholders and not shareholders’ (PL)

The notion of transferability has already been considered in a general way and it would be inappropriate to extrapolate the findings of these ten case studies to a larger context. However a deeper understanding of the model, the interaction between the different elements, and its application in a school context may be claimed.

Case study seems a poor basis for generalization. Only a single case or just a few cases will be studied, but these will be studied at length...Seldom is an entirely new understanding reached but refinement of understanding is. (Stake, 1995:7)

As a pilot for a study with greater scope these findings do suggest that further investigation may be worthwhile and enlightening. An important caveat is that unlike the original research project, this small scale study has only considered schools which have made the progression from ‘Good to Great’ and it may be that those elements identified in these ten cases can be identified in any school, even those which are not successful – any further investigation would need to address this.

On reflection, it is possible to identify parts of the research process which could be improved – the first two videos of interviews revealed my enthusiasm when Key Concepts from the *Good to Great* research were raised – this may not have been appropriate and could have tainted the stories being told to me. This evaluation informed the conduct of later interviews. It is also possible that as I have focussed on the model proposed by the original study for interview coding I

may have missed alternative interpretations. I have tried to be aware of this and the inclusion of an additional category indicates an openness to complementary ways of understanding.

Ultimately, the interpretations of the researcher are likely to be emphasised more than the interpretations of those people studied, but the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the *multiple realities*, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening. (Stake,1995:12)

Tony Blair, in his farewell speech to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Conference in November 2006, stated that he thought it 'odd' that people often debated educational policy 'as if no empirical evidence at all existed as to what works and what doesn't'. He went on to argue that it is 'reasonably clear up to a point: A strong headteacher. Well motivated staff. Attention to the basics, but also imparting the thrill of knowledge. Discipline. Good manners and life skills. Schools succeed that have a powerful ethos, sense of purpose, pride in themselves and what they do.' He then poses the question: 'What are the structures within which such attributes are most likely to be cultivated?'

It is hoped that this modest study may make some small contribution to a wider debate.

Collins (2001:209) asks the question 'Why greatness' and then almost immediately responds by suggesting that it is almost a nonsense question – he claims that if you care enough about what you do, then the question should simply be 'how?' – if you have to ask why, he suggests that the person who has to ask why may be in the wrong line of work. The aspiration for *Every School a Great School* is claimed by Hopkins (2006) in his recent book of that name:

'Ask any parent about the goal of educational reform and the answer is simple –why can't every school be a great school? It's a no-brainer.'  
(Hopkins, 2006:5)

Hopkins (2006:13) identifies a 'plateau effect' which he suggests is characteristic of centrally driven change,

'This trend has been noted in virtually every large scale reform initiative. What usually happens is that early success is followed by this levelling off along with a lack of commitment to the programme of reform.... The argument here is that, to ensure that every school becomes a great school, the plateau has to be turned into a platform for further achievement'.

He goes on to identify five system wide problems, to be addressed before the goal becomes a realistic expectation: 'Underperformance at all levels; Slow progress in secondary education; A focus on management rather than leadership; Restricted nature of teaching quality; Excellence and equity, with deprivation being the root cause of low attainment.' (Hopkins, 2006:13)

Collins (2005:31) appreciates the systemic factors facing the social sectors, which he believes are significant and must be addressed. He and Hopkins would agree that pockets of 'greatness' can be found in nearly every difficult environment, although Collins would not accept deprivation as a root cause of low attainment.

'Every institution has its unique set of irrational and difficult constraints, yet some make a leap while others facing the same environmental challenges do not. This is perhaps the single most important pointing all of Good to Great. Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline.' (Collins, 2005:31)

The relevance of the *Good to Great* conceptual framework may be helpful to inform practice in other schools – with so many initiatives and potential paths for school leaders to follow it may be useful to draw on this model as a 'touchstone' when considering what is really important in schools and how to prioritise.

Collins makes rather a grand claim in this respect:

The point of this entire book is not that we should 'add' these findings to what we are already doing and make ourselves even more overworked. No, the point is to realize that much of what we're doing is at best a waste of energy. If we organized the majority of our work time around applying these principles, and pretty much ignored or stopped doing everything else, our lives would be simpler and our results vastly improved. (Collins, 2001:205)

The aim of this thesis in applying an existing model to a new situation has been achieved and the learning will certainly be helpful to the author as he moves to his second headship.

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GOOD TO GREAT SCHOOLS  
CODING FREQUENCIES

Frequencies for Interview

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Totals %

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Fly wheel not Doom Loop FW (Total for Category)</b>	8	3	3	4	4	7	4	1	2	3	39	11
Break through (165) - FW/brk											0	0
view from outside (168) - FW/brk/view	2			2		2	1				7	2
Doom loop - new directions and constant change (178) - FW/doom			3	1		3					7	2
Build up - FW/bu/										2	2	1
Consistency and coherence - FW/bu/con	2	1		1	3	2	2	1	1	1	14	4
alignment - FW/bu/align	4	2			1		1		1		9	3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Confront the Brutal Facts - CBF (Total for Category)</b>	5	4	4	6	5	1	7	1	3	11	47	13
Climate where truth is heard (73) - CBF/truth			3	2	2		2			3	12	3
dialogue and debate, not coercion (75) - CBF/truth/dia	1			1			1			3	6	2
autopsies without blame (77) - CBF/truth/blamex		1			1					3	5	1
Lead with Os not As (74) - CBF/truth/q							1		1	2	4	1
Stockdale paradox (keep faith) (86) - CBF/sp	2	2	1	1			1				7	2
facts better than dreams (68/71) - CBF/fact	2	1		1	1	1	1	1			8	2
red flag when info cannot be ignored (78/91) - CBF/fact/flag				1	1		1		2		5	1
Niceness prevents (SS32) - CBF/Nicex											0	0

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Hedgehog Concept - HHC (Total for Category)</b>	2	7	2	5	7	5	7	4	4	9	52	15
simplify to single organising idea (91) - HHC/sing		3	2		3		4		2	5	19	5
4 year timescale (98) - HHC/sing/4yr											0	0
3 circles intersection (95) - HHC/30											0	0
what you are passionate about (98) - HHC/30/pass				2						3	5	1
understanding passion not bravado (98) - HHC/30/und	1	1		2	2		1				7	2
what drives your Resource engine (95/SS33) - HHC/30/eng											0	0
Time, Money, Brand (SS33) HHC/30/eng/tmb	1	3		1	1	5	1	4	2	1	19	5
What you can be best at (95) HHC/30/best					1		1				2	1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Technology Accelerators TA (Total for Category)</b>	5	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	13	4
Fit - TA/fit	3		1			1					5	1
Link to Hedgehog concept - TA/HHC	1	1	1							1	4	1
accelerator not creator - TA/trex	1	1	1							1	4	1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Culture of Discipline - COD (Total for Category)</b>	7	4	7	6	3	5	5	5	5	8	55	16
ethic of entrepreneurship (128) - COD/entr			3			1				1	5	1
culture not tyrant (129) - COD/entr/tyx	1	1	1	2	1		1	1		1	9	3
Discipline - stick to Hedgehog Concept (120) - COD/HHC	2		1			1	1	1	1	2	9	3
people>thought>action (127) - COD/dis/pa	3	2	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	4	25	7
freedom + responsibility (124) - COD/dis/free	1	1	1	1		1			2		7	2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>First Who Then What - 1WTW (Total for Category)</b>	11	6	2	0	5	2	8	6	4	2	46	13
when you know you need to make a people change - act (56) - 1WTW/act	1	2			1		1	2			7	2
best people on best opportunities not biggest problems (58) - 1WTW/best	3	2			1		3		1		10	3
sheer rigour in selection - 1WTW/rig			2		2	2	1	3	1		11	3
right person - more to do with character traits than innate capabilities (64) - 1WTW/rig/right	7	2			1		3	1	2	2	18	5
when in doubt - keep looking (54) - 1WTW/rig/look											0	0

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Level 5 Leadership - L5L (Total for Category)</b>	6	5	6	9	15	4	17	6	9	7	84	24
professional will (21) - L5L/will				1	1						2	1
window and mirror (33) - L5L/will/mirr				3	1		5				9	3
set high standards settle for nothing less - L5L/will/stan	1	2	2	2	1		2	3	4	1	18	5
resolve to do what must be done (30) - L5L/will/rsv		2			4		1	2		3	12	3
Ambition for school not self (21) - L5L/amb	1	1			1				1		4	1
cultivates new leaders from inside (39) - L5L/new	1				1		1			1	4	1
personal humility (21) - L5L/hum											0	0
acts with quiet determination (28) - L5L/hum/determ	1		1	1	2	1	1				7	2
attributes success to good luck (33) - L5L/hum/luck						1	1	1			3	1
modest, never boastful (27) - L5L/hum/mod	2			1	1				1		5	1
Legislative leadership (SS11) - L5L/legis			3	1	3	2	6		3	2	20	6

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals	%
<b>Stakeholder Support - SS (Total for Category)</b>	6	0	4	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	15	4
Governors - SS/gov	2		1	1		1			1		6	2
Parents - SS/par	3		3				1		1		6	2
Pupils - SS/pup	1										1	0

Total for interview

50 31 31 31 39 26 49 23 29 42 351