FULL PRACTITIONER ENQUIRY REPORT

SUMMER 2003

It's All in the Mix:

Leadership teams in secondary schools – what do they do, and how do they judge their success?

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Contents

Introduction

The direct impact of leadership on the success of schools is widely accepted. West-Burnham (in Davies and Ellison, 1997) argues that there is "overwhelming consensus about the relationship between leadership and effective, successful or improving schools". The formation of the National College for School Leadership; OFSTED's inclusion of leadership as a separate judgement; and the changes to the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document in 2000 have given a framework of support to this consensus.

Of particular interest to me was the initiative that the Pay and Conditions document (2000) introduced for the group of people charged with the strategic leadership of a school. The rhetoric promoting this concept in the document gave support to a collegial style of leadership rather than one that viewed the role of the headteacher (supported by deputies) as the key (heroic?) leader. There were references to a leadership group, which would include the headteacher, deputy headteacher(s) and a new role, that of assistant headteacher.

As a headteacher in a school where we had already begun a journey into a more collaborative style of leadership, aiming to develop leadership in all staff, I was pleased at the prospect of being able to acknowledge formally the strategic role that senior managers at the school were already playing. I was also intrigued to find out how other schools were handling the leadership group concept, and how they were moving from a 'senior management team' to a 'leadership group'.

This project

I wanted to find out what recipe and utensils had been used to 'mix the cake' in other schools. Casual conversations with headteacher colleagues revealed a range of approaches to the Government's drive for leadership groups in schools. Hence this project.

I set out to discover, that given the opportunity to reform/form a leadership group, what decisions had been taken in successful schools?

Key questions for the investigation

This report uses the situations observed in seven beacon schools to attempt to answer these questions about leadership groups in successful secondary schools.

- How are groups composed, and what do the members do?
  (What utensils and ingredients are used, what is the kitchen like, how is the cake mixed and baked?)
- How do they work with stakeholders?
  (Who eats the cake?)
- What are the main characteristics of the leadership styles?
  (What sort of cake has been baked?)
- How do teams get feedback on the success of their work?
  (How is the cake judged?)

Key features of leadership groups arising from this investigation

The team building skills of the headteacher
(cake mixing)

The search for new learning and the deep reflection undertaken by headteachers
(learning new recipes)

The open or frank conversations that happened either through performance management or in discussions generally within the leadership group
(the method of mixing used)

The allocation of quality time for planning and reflection by the group
(opportunity to blend the ingredients)

The work with middle tier leaders and governors
(additional utensils and ingredients)

The headteacher's firm views of what leadership should look like in each school
(the cook's correct choice of cake)

The evaluation of the corporate and individual performances of members of the leadership group
(the feedback from the judge used to improve the next cake)

The discussions of the focus group at a seminar supported the findings of the interviews across the larger group of schools. The complex nature of the job of the headteacher was further informed by the seminar, particularly in terms of the context that the governing body gives to the leadership in a school. The relationship of the headteacher with the chair of governors, together with the view of leadership held by the chair appeared to have a major impact on how headteachers operated. The questions, "who supports the head?" and "where does a head find information and advice?" are unanswered by this investigation and require further research. These features had an impact on design and activities of leadership groups for this report, and thereby influence conclusions drawn.

What leadership teams do

The common aspects of the activities of all the schools is the time designated for planning and review by the leadership groups, and the reflection of the headteachers. These schools operated a variety of structures and hierarchies in their management and leadership functions. Allocations of responsibilities were also varied, but had clarity. Common concerns focused on working with governors and middle managers.

Therefore, lessons to be taken from these successful schools are:

- time for review, reflection and discussion of day-to-day and strategic issues is vital, and contributes to the overall successes of these schools
- clear and understandable job descriptions and allocation of responsibilities (the underpinning structures) appear to be more important than the type of hierarchy that exists in the group
- relationships based on openness and rigorous debate are key, and the belief that leadership should be recognisable and respected is implicit

Judging success

Formal methods of evaluation of the corporate and individual work of leadership teams were not found to be consistent across this set of schools. However, all the headteachers engaged in reflection and some evaluation of the work of the leadership groups. The search for continual improvement was a common factor across the schools.

Background

Team or group?

The Government's choice of title – leadership group – was significant. Schools had become accustomed to a senior management team; now the title had subtle changes that implied something different. Katzenbach and Smith (1994) would argue that the new concept could not be a team because it inevitably would not meet their 'six team basics' that define a team. They believe that top management groups function best as working groups.

Leadership or management?

The differences between leadership and management functions were also brought into sharp focus by this choice. The Pay and Conditions document simply stated that members of the leadership group should have strategic responsibilities in the school. What would be the defining features of such roles, that differentiated them from those of senior managers?

Analyses of how leadership roles separate themselves from management roles are now widespread. It is also widely acknowledged that there is a need for both, and that both are "integrally and inseparably related" (MacBeath and Myers, 1999). Kotter's proposal (1996) is neatly drawn and commonly used as a basis to draw a distinction:

Management	**Leadership**
planning and budgeting	establishing direction
controlling and problem solving	aligning people
organising and staffing	motivating and inspiring

West-Burnham (in Davies and Ellison, 1997) clarifies this further:

MANAGING is concerned with:	*LEADING is concerned with:*
implementation	vision
operational issues	strategic issues
transaction	transformation
means	ends
systems	people
doing things right	doing the right things

What is strategic leadership?

The particular reference in the Pay and Conditions document to 'strategic leadership' may reflect the need for a short description that ensured some clarity about the requirements for a role to be placed on the new leadership spine. However, in terms of the distinguishing features in the tables above, this raises questions about the concept of the function of the leadership group. Inevitably, there are many groups with an influence over the leadership of schools. Was there an

implication that leadership groups in schools took responsibility only for the 'strategic issues'? Discussion of the implications for educational leadership in the political landscape are for other papers. However, in view of the Government's descriptor, a definition of strategic leadership is important for this study. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) propose that "exercising strategic leadership" involves actions that are concerned with:

- keeping abreast of trends and issues, threats or opportunities; discerning megatrends and anticipating impacts
- sharing knowledge
- establishing structures and processes that are enabling; being a key source of expertise
- ensuring that the attention of the school community is focused on matters of strategic importance
- monitoring and enabling a process of continuous review

Caldwell (in Day et al, 1999) refers to strategic leadership and strategic management as important dimensions of transformational leadership. He suggests that strategic leadership refers to "a capacity to understand emerging trends in society at large and in schools generally, discerning their likely impact on the school and working with others to develop a capacity for state-of-the-art learning". Meanwhile, the dimension of strategic management "involves emergent strategy, strategic planning, entrepreneurship and strategic intent".

However, it is generally agreed that there are many more aspects of leadership (and management) that are associated with success. Caldwell (1999) completes the list of dimensions with cultural leadership, educational leadership and responsive leadership. The Pay and Conditions document's simple description of the work of a member of the leadership group as being strategic, belies the true impact that would be required from these people. If they were to be key leaders in the school, then their roles would encompass a more complex blend of skills, understanding and abilities.

Leadership for learning?

Leadership cannot be simplified into short definitions, nor does it necessarily reside only in people who bear the appropriate title. It demands a complex set of skills and attributes; a repertoire of competencies complemented by competences (Davies and Ellison, 1997) that come together to make a powerful whole. Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) propose that leadership should be networked throughout the school. They argue that "leaders for learning" are required to be on a journey that encompasses seven interrelated learnings:

> Understanding learning, making connections, futures thinking, contextual knowledge, critical thinking, political acumen, and emotional understanding.

Senge et al (2000) have started a debate around a new model of leadership for public education. It focuses on four key competencies that allow people to lead without having to control. These competences are labelled as engagement, systems thinking, leading learning and self-awareness.

The power of the group

These learnings, competencies and competences will be present in individuals as they take on leadership functions, and in the leadership group as a whole. It is the corporate leadership that then becomes a forceful change agent in a school. Each individual brings to the group a set of skills and attributes that can combine with others' to form the whole.

Davies and West-Burnham (in Davies and Ellison, 1997) argue that a successful school is an amalgam of successes, and that given the complexity of modern schooling, it is highly unlikely that any one individual could combine all the necessary aspects of leadership. The emphasis on leadership as a shared function is much more likely to meet the needs of the future schools than the traditional 'British obsession' with the 'heroic leader'. This supports Senge's (2000) view of leadership for education, and the proposition by Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003). The future success in leadership terms proposes to be one where leadership is distributed through all levels in an institution.

Baking the cake: completing the puzzle?

It is the combining of the three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle (competences, competencies and the individual institution) that is the basis for this investigation. As headteacher, I had approached the formation of a leadership group as a key challenge, and an important strategic concept for the development of the school. I was supported by my governors in studying how we might transform the senior management team into a leadership group. We approached this task using problem-solving techniques, individual discussions centred on competences and interests, and in discussion groups. The solution brought into fruition a group of people with responsibilities for whole school developments that combined to represent the whole, and that had 'wiggle room' for new developments.

I believe that we had achieved more than the building of a three-dimensional jigsaw. Rather, we had baked a cake! A cake that was planned to service the hunger of a developing school, baked in a particular kitchen (the school) with particular utensils (the competences of the people) and particular ingredients (the competencies of the people). The cake had to be rich in the nutrients required by the school for growth. How would we know that we had baked the correct cake, and how might we then modify it in order to suit the changing needs of the school?

Results

In order to ensure anonymity, I have chosen to refer to the schools by using alternative labels:

- **A** has 1,000 pupils on role, and is an 11–16 comprehensive in a rural part of the country
- **B** is an 11–18 comprehensive of 1,330 pupils in a large city
- **C** is an 11–18 city technology college in a small town that has suffered economically since the decline of local major industry
- **D** is an 11–18 (previously grant maintained) school in a medium sized city with 1,055 pupils
- **E** is a small school (less than 500 pupils) for pupils aged 11–14 in an industrial small town
- **F** is a school that shares a sixth form with another school, and including this has 1,415 pupils from 11–18
- **G** is an 11–18 school for 1,040 pupils in a market town

It is possible to divide the original seven schools into three main groups.

Group 1: C and D

Both these schools have a flatter structure to their leadership groups. They have developed this structure from the one that existed when they took up post, and implemented performance related pay. Appointments were largely internal. They also have a history or context of being 'non-LEA'. (One had been grant maintained, the other was a city technology college, and was therefore directly funded by the government). Both had governing bodies that operated a 'hands-off' approach, backed up by rigorous performance management and formal evaluation processes.

Group 2: B and G

These two schools are LEA funded with governing bodies that supported their recent reviews of the leadership group. The headteachers in both schools had confronted poor performance by senior managers, and had restructured the leadership group recently. They had taken much time to reflect on and review what the school needed, and what sorts of competencies were needed to take the school forward. Their senior teams had largely been formed from internal promotions, backed up by development time and training. School B engaged in formal evaluation of teamwork, but the team at School G had not been formed long enough to consider this.

Group 3: A, E and F

All three of these schools are LEA schools with long histories and distinctive local contexts. The heads in these schools operated with a team of people who had long experience in the schools. They had accepted the challenge of moving the school forward with these people, sometimes by redefining job descriptions, or usually by adding others to the team. These additions complemented the existing skills and qualities of the people in the leadership group. These headteachers knew where the strengths of the staff lay, and who they could call upon to move the school forward (not necessarily members of the leadership group.) These heads also spent time training their governors. Their methods of evaluating the work of the leadership group were informal.

Findings

How are teams composed?	
The size of the teams varied between four and eight people, but this was not related to the number of pupils on role. The number of leadership team members could be related to the teaching commitments of the personnel involved, and the extended management structure of the school. Two schools operated a system of secondments to the leadership group. One school had a member of the support staff on the team (the administrator). Five schools used the assistant headteacher level as well as deputy head, with the implication that deputy was senior to assistant. Three of the schools had one deputy, two had two deputies. However, in the other two schools, the team was composed entirely of deputies with the head.	The leadership team in C comprised the head and three deputy heads, with none carrying a teaching commitment. This school had no head of year pastoral system, with a philosophy of “close coupling between event and action”. E, with about half the pupil numbers of C, had a leadership team comprising the head, a deputy (teaching load 50%) and three assistant heads (teaching loads between 60% to 75%). B, with a similar number of pupils and age range as C, had a leadership team comprising the head, two deputy heads, five assistant heads and traditionally added a secondment to the team.
What do the members of the leadership team do?	
Headteachers carried minimal teaching loads; between 0% and 12%. Deputy heads taught between 0% and 50% of the timetabled week and assistant heads taught between 33% and 75%. All engaged in routine briefings and meetings as a team, to keep in touch. Three schools had daily team briefings with a weekly meeting; two had weekly briefings with longer meetings either weekly (in one case) or monthly (in the other case). Two schools met as a team once a week. All planned time away to focus on development issues.	In A, the headteacher had a teaching commitment of 12%, and the team comprised the head, a deputy (teaching 36% of timetable) and three assistant heads all teaching 48%. E held short briefings once per week with monthly meetings focused on a single item. In the much larger B, the team had daily briefings, weekly meetings and a ‘drop-in’ weekly session on Fridays after school. This allowed members to ‘get things off their chests’, and kept the head in touch. B, E and F plan meetings in advance. B also organised extended meetings to develop team and personal skills, so that they deliver professional development through what are known as learning fairs at all levels of the organisation. A had one longer meeting per month with a single item agenda. In C, the leadership team took one day per term out of school to undertake review or development activities. D and G took time away, for a night,

	to do such evaluation and planning, whilst E also took weekend time.
All members of the teams had strategic responsibilities to develop specific issues in the school. In five of the schools, there was a clear split of responsibilities between pastoral and curriculum aspects. Four of the schools made human resources a specific responsibility. Job titles covered a broad range, though did not necessarily indicate great differences in the sort of work undertaken.	In A, the deputy had a quality assurance and curriculum brief, with assistant heads being responsible for Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and community. The aim of these designations was to overcome the traditional pastoral/curriculum divide in secondary schools. B, with the deputies taking responsibilities for pastoral and organisation, and curriculum and timetable, then gave the brief of progress and welfare to two assistant heads, with the other three being charged with social inclusion, monitoring and evaluation, and assessment, data and reporting. This school then seconded a further person to take on a single development brief. D had four deputies taking responsibilities for achievement, human resources, resources and allocation, and teaching and learning. This school also used a secondment to develop a project.
How do they work with other stakeholders?	
Leadership teams had a clear link to the 'middle' management in the schools, though not with the prime objective of line management. However, in one school members of the leadership team carried dual responsibilities, often being a middle manager themselves.	In A, links to middle management existed through leadership functions (eg the key stages) rather then direct line management. The leadership team in D worked closely with departments in the school, particularly on development issues. In E, two of the assistant heads are also heads of department, and the other is a head of year.
Team members organised or chaired staff committees or development groups.	In F, the deputies organised and chaired meetings of heads of year or heads of department. In B, the aspiration for the leadership team is that they and the middle managers should be viewed as 'leading learners'. Therefore the relationship with middle tier staff is more one of consultancy or coaching.
In five of the schools, the leadership team members either serviced or advised governor committees.	In D, the headteacher does not attend governors' committee meetings, but the relevant deputy is expected to undertake that role. G has developed leadership roles that mirror governors' committees.

Depending on their particular brief, members of the leadership teams were the direct link to outside agencies.	In A, the key stage managers have direct links to social services, education welfare services, parents and local schools and colleges for the purpose of transition. One of the deputies in D (responsible for resources and allocation) raises the equivalent of his own salary through working with external awarding bodies and sponsors.
What are the main characteristics of the leadership style?	
In all cases the central role of the headteacher was evident. Headteachers had a clear perception of what leadership should look like in their school, and how important their personal function was in the delivery of that vision. They undertook much reflection about management and leadership, and the skills required for these dimensions to be successful. They were aware of issues surrounding communication and delegation, and encouraged autonomous decision making.	In A, D and G, headteachers discussed their ideas for improving the leadership team, either through a complete restructuring (made possible due to a resignation) or by increasing the number of people on the team. Ideas for such changes emanated from the headteachers as they contemplated issues within the school and forthcoming initiatives. At D, the role of the headteacher in supporting decisions taken had been discussed, and a policy agreed with members of the leadership team.
Headteachers were aware of the impact on the rest of the school of the leadership team's operating style. The importance of 'doing it our way' was emphasised.	D had devised its own 'core qualities' for the staff, and leadership was one of the four. This focus ensured that the leadership team 'walked the talk' in public, with an agreement that debates and differences should remain confidential within the team. At B the philosophy was that the team should be closely linked to teaching and learning, and should continue to learn about leading.
Headteachers had a deep knowledge of team members' individual strengths, and how they could work well together. There was great value placed on teamworking, trust, openness, mutual support and shared problem solving.	At C, the headteacher perceived his leadership team to be "deep in different skills", and supportive of each other. The headteacher of E talked about different relationships in the team, and how well they all knew each other. In the recent reorganisation planning undertaken at G, the headteacher had placed great value on teamworking potential and relationships. Formal analysis of team members' skills had been undertaken in B and D. B and G schools had undertaken training aimed at building a team.
The leadership team's corporate responsibility for driving the development of the school was clearly acknowledged.	In C, the leadership team had corporate responsibility for quality assurance.

Value was placed on good communications – with each other and the whole school community.	A was acutely aware of the issue of communication with the whole staff body, and undertook to be in the staff room regularly. D met with the staff every other morning.
Leadership was distributed amongst the team, with clear roles of responsibility and an understanding that they exercised leadership.	Job descriptions at all schools were clearly delineated. The word 'leadership' appeared in seven out of the eight job profiles in B. Four out of the six members of the leadership team at F were designated to lead in their job descriptions.
Making time to plan/ think/ talk/ analyse was acknowledged as vital.	B organised a residential in conjunction with another school to work on leading learning and to help build a team. C took one day per term out of school to review how the school and the team were doing. D did this activity twice per term.
How do teams get feedback on the success of their work?	
Five of the schools undertook some sort of reflection or evaluation activity. One of the remaining two planned to take an 'away day' to do this.	B, C and D schools had made this part of the school's review and performance activities.
Three schools employed an external consultant for feedback on their work. Of these, two used the team's corporate work only, whereas the other used the review to give a 360 degree feedback on both individual and corporate work.	C used a consultant annually to report both individually and corporately on the work of the team. D had used an external consultant in addition to a questionnaire.
Two schools used their own methods, with one using an annual anonymous questionnaire to staff and the other engaging in open discussion of each other's approach to work.	E took time out (usually a weekend) to engage in person-to-group discussions of how they were operating both individually and as a team. D issued the same questionnaire annually to enable a comparison of their performance.
School results were used as performance indicators.	D used team reviews, results and informal discussions to complement information gathered via a questionnaire, to keep themselves alert to their corporate performance.
OFSTED reports, SATs, informal discussions with staff and students were also used as indicators of corporate performance.	B used an external consultant (shared with another school) and followed this with discussions of how to work together, training and team development time.

All reviews were followed up with discussion of how to improve, and sometimes with training. Two of the five schools that undertook review/ evaluation of the team's work had clear links to pay for its members.	C employed a consultant to evaluate the work of individual leadership team members as well as the corporate work. The personal information was used as part of the performance management review, which was linked to pay.

Discussion of the results

Composition

The investigation into the activities of this very small sample of schools revealed variation in terms of structure and roles, though the majority had all three levels of possible appointments on the leadership spine of the Pay and Conditions document. The context of the school (ie the situation that the present headteacher inherited) had a major influence on the structure, ("changes have been made opportunistically", Headteacher of G). There were cases (at B and G) where opportunities had arisen to derive a more radical structure but the more hierarchical structure had been retained. In either case (the 'flatter' group with a headteacher and deputies or the three layered approach), one could argue that status was not a major factor in the part played by each member of the group. Evidently, in most cases, assistant heads were expected to do more teaching, which must have some bearing on the leadership impact they had. The schools that had a flatter structure had embraced this philosophy and that of performance pay. The structure also played the part of a statement about what leadership and management in the school should be.

> We have an unwritten code. There will be vigorous debates; but the headteacher will not override decisions as long as they are taken after full discussion. There is an expectation that the Head will speak to those members who have let the team down.

However, this philosophy was not confined only to these schools, and those with three tiers in the leadership group worked hard to develop relationships that respected all views, holding learning as a key value. Some heads valued highly the relationship that they had with the deputy(s). The question, "Who supports the head?" was easily answered in these schools, and there was a sense that they were less 'separated' from the leadership group because of the linking role that the deputy played. I gathered a much stronger sense of team from the headteachers with deputies and assistant headteachers in the structure, than in those without. The reasons for this, of course, could be many and varied, but I became convinced of the special role of a deputy whose main task was to deputise for the headteacher, as opposed to being a member of a group of strategic leaders.

> The deputy is my right hand man, we have lots of conversations, share concerns, and dreads. (Headteacher, E)

Secondments

Secondments to the leadership group were another dimension of the leadership ethos in two schools. These had provided professional development for staff, and in one school a permanent appointment to the leadership group had resulted from a very successful secondment. The difficulty of moving people back into a previous post had been an issue, but both schools were determined to keep the system in place, as they believed this was encouraging a view that senior leadership could be shared, and that the leadership skills developed contributed to the ethos in the schools. It is argued that, in "leaderful" schools (Green, 2002), such opportunities will be a main plank in ensuring that all members of a school community contribute their leadership skills and understanding.

Communication

Regular contact through briefings and meetings was a common feature in the sample. Time away from the workplace to discuss issues of strategic importance, or the work of the leadership group were highly valued by all. This was more commonly taken as an extended weekend, though there were examples of time being taken during the working week. The type of work undertaken focused on the development planning for the school, and discussion of evaluations of the group's work. Meetings provided opportunities for team building and planning. At G a new team was about to be launched, and the 'away day' was a key feature in bringing people together to start to build a leadership ethos and define the priorities for the year. The sample of schools had overcome any barriers to the idea of being out of school during the school day, or to giving personal time at particular weekends. The evidence showed that such time was highly valued and made a difference to how the group worked corporately and individually in school. The time gave the opportunity to know the definition of 'our way', and how to put it into practice.

Roles and responsibilities

Given the ongoing debate about addressing the whole needs of the learner versus the pastoral/curriculum divide in secondary schools, I was surprised at the low proportion of schools in the sample that had tried to address this issue through the job definitions of the leadership group. Indeed, the majority gave substance to the 'divide' by the jobs allocated. C, with its "close coupling between event and action" had developed a structure throughout the whole school that put reaction/action squarely on the shoulders of the person that encountered the incident, with the tutor as the link between the learner and home etc (there are no heads of year or pastoral system at this school). Though other schools had started to get near to this, none of the others did.

Nevertheless, the jobs outlined for the members of the leadership groups in all schools could be compared to Caldwell's definition of strategic leadership, and I believe that the majority of posts described demanded leadership qualities of the post holder.

Links

Though there were not always overt references to performance management of middle tier leaders, most of the leadership group members were expected to lead them. This might be in terms of an issue, through meetings, by consultation or through a coaching model. Two schools identified where most support was needed – by examination results – and would then decide how to approach that problem. In F, the middle tier leaders were seen as the 'accelerators' in the school, whilst in others there were concerns that these people had become stuck in this post; "a glass ceiling for other more junior staff to overcome if they want promotion". Working with and through middle tier leaders, and finding ways of developing them, were issues in nearly all of the schools. There was a range of ideas about how to deal with the situation in each school.

The links to governors were commonly held as important. This aspect of leadership work developed more discussion at the seminar, confirming the involvement of the leadership group with governors as being important.

Characteristics of leadership

All headteachers were experienced in their job and had cultivated their own views of what leadership styles were needed for their schools. Books or people they had encountered in the field of leadership had influenced a number. For example, B have worked with John West-

Burnham; at G, the headteacher's reading of Peters and Waterman had made a big impact on his perception of how he performed his role; and at A, the headteacher's engagement with the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) had caused him to reflect in a similar way. Their reading of the histories of their schools, together with their perceptions of the people and skills they worked with was profoundly impressive. A common trait was that they continually searched for ways to improve.

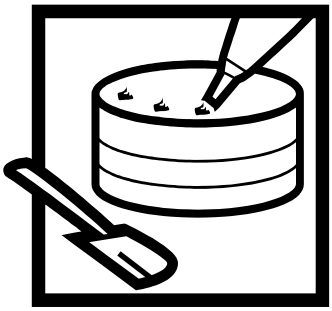
> Good and improving schools are acutely aware of their weaknesses, and where they need to develop. (Headteacher, D)

None seemed impressed by the 'beacon' label, but all wanted to share expertise and learn from others.

Evaluation

The majority undertook some evaluation of the corporate work of the leadership group, some combining this with evaluation of individual's work. The use of consultants and questionnaires was an attempt to apply some rigour to the task. However, the accuracy of the instrument cannot be matched by the power of a conversation that follows the report. The use of 'away days' to discuss the report, or to engage in a frank debate about individual and corporate professional work must surely be recognised as a measure of the strength in the leadership groups of these schools.

> We discuss strengths and weaknesses; problems that prevent satisfactory working with each other – these meetings are confidential. They can be difficult, but have weathered the storm.
>
> The team now has to debate how to respond to the consultant's report. It has a timely warning for the team.



The seminar

In the second part of this investigation, a seminar followed up these features. Four of the headteachers conducted a conversation according to a pre-arranged agenda. This was the instrument designed to substantiate the key features drawn out from the first part of the investigation. Such a relaxed conversation would also confirm the evidence gathered, and for NCSL provided a forum where ideas for future leadership development work could be put forward.

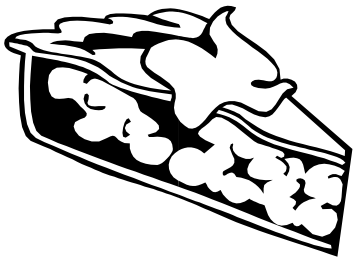
Team building	
There was a consensus that this mattered and that openness was key. The discussion of what 'whole school leadership' looked like in action spoke of members of the group being aware of all the issues, about keeping the questions referred to the relevant person, about strengths and weaknesses in the team being brought out into the open.	"They have to walk and talk as though they are whole school leaders." "We are all good starters, and only one is a good finisher." "When there are difficult decisions to make, we bring them to the team, there's no isolation, we value team work always." "They get very concerned about operational views, and I have to work very hard to get them to see the longer term – it's not always about lockers!" "I put together a team with different strengths."
Learning and reflection	
There was general agreement that the most useful learning for headteachers came from networking with others. The most valuable of these conversations were at a national level. The whole of the conversations over the period of the seminar confirmed that these heads engaged in reflection and debate about leadership regularly. They regarded the interpersonal aspect of their job as a high priority. There was a call for NCSL to take a lead in the agenda surrounding building leadership teams, sustaining them and regenerating them.	"I often ring up heads I know saying I've no idea how to do this, what do you do?" "It's about kindred spirits – how do you find them?" "Perhaps we need a pool of mentors, and you are attached to this pool." "NPQH [National Professional Qualification for Headship] only comes up with one model of a head – and it's all about the head – it's not good enough." "The white charger super head is a myth." "Do we need a five-year MOT with leadership teams and the head?"

	"Can NCSL come up with a programme on how you build and keep teams motivated – no-one else does this."
Frank conversations	
Being frank but caring featured much in the conversations. Two of the schools operated a performance related pay scheme, and so discussions about professional work had a harder edge in these schools. Clear criteria for making judgements were an important facet of this process, along with professional development. There was agreement that the service that the school offered was priority, and conversations with staff about performance had to relate to this. Leadership teams had to understand that honesty and openness were vital to the health of the service offered. Further discussions about the importance of public statements by the headteacher to 'get the message across' were necessary.	"We have discussed what leadership is about. We have a code of conduct. I would discipline if necessary. Team talking about expectations, and what they expect of me is vital." "I negotiate all salaries with individuals each year – I have the performance data, and make the decisions." "It's the fact that they know the school is turning them down, not an individual." "I have individual talks (with the leadership team) once per term, so keep on the boil. Also half an hour every day allows this." "I do a lot of work with whole staff. I do the difficult messages with everyone, they hear the words from my mouth."
Time	
The allocation of time for the leadership group to plan, evaluate and discuss performance was a high priority. In one case, the headteacher found difficulty in arranging time away because of how his members viewed their working hours. This problem was overcome by allocating a substantial period of time during the working week. Such allocations of time found barriers in schools where the leadership group had teaching commitments.	"We make time by having time away – at weekends – three or four times a year." "We use Friday and Saturday stay-overs. We also take time to go out visiting – to steal ideas!" "We often go offsite for senior meetings, or hide in the board room." "Time is vital." "None of my deputies do any teaching – you don't see the manager of Ford screwing wheels on! Demands on their time conflict with teaching." "We all teach because we want to – it's part of the culture."

Working with middle tier leaders and governors	
Concern was expressed about both these groups of stakeholders. Aspirations for middle tier leaders to be leaders were not held to be met. There was agreement that the 'message' did not get through to staff via this group of managers. Different approaches to solving this problem were discussed, including a strategy to be adopted by one school that was to give the leadership team responsibility for strategic development of subject areas. The smaller school found this less of an issue, probably because some of the senior team had dual responsibilities, including leadership of an area normally designated middle management. Relationships with governors had a variety of dimensions, and the discussions focused particularly on the impact of the chair of governors on the leadership styles adopted, and the capacity of the school to develop fresh ways of working with staff. This appeared as a much bigger issue at the seminar than it had during the first phase of information gathering.	"Middle managers see themselves as representing a team in the school, rather than leaders." "Middle managers don't play much part in the leadership of the school." "The more hierarchies you have, the more diluted the message becomes." "We see the middle managers as a glass ceiling that suppresses other talent." "I want governors to be in departments – to challenge heads of department to explain what they are about." "Governors give me a totally free hand – when I get it right." "My governors have been there a long time. I want them to think strategically. We have used training for them." "A lot depends on the maturity of governors. Mine have slipped into a role now, after lots of training." "My governors want to know what plans you have to sort out problems. You must have a plan worked out before you go to governors." "Relationship with the chair is vital. I was bullied by my chair – in the end he went – it was either him or me. I see my job as running the school." "I have a good relationship – he says it's the best leisure activity for him in the week – it's not strategic. I wish we had a debate on some issues." "We meet once per half term. He always turns up early – to catch you unawares! He likes to find out what's going on, gives it his full brainpower. You feel supported, credited."

Headteachers' views of what leadership should look like	
There was clearly agreement that leadership must be respected as important in the school. Headteachers knew how their senior staff should behave, and what the school should learn about strategy management, and vision from these people. Governors' views of what leadership should look like had an impact on the work of the headteacher and the leadership group. This was an important context for the heads to work within. Some found that governors had been enabling, expecting a certain 'maturity' or 'business-like' approach, but others found that they had to educate their governors about the role and about leadership and management.	"What underpins all this is taking time to make the philosophy clear and open to all." "We all share aspects of headship – but you are the boss." "Context is crucial – you would need a different approach in the Ridings situation." "My chair of governors is an international coach for Perkins. He made it clear that he expected the school to be able to carry on and be run well if I fell under a bus." "I take from my chair the views of the community, and are we going in the right direction?" "Lots of time is given to keeping the governors involved, not always the chair."
Evaluation of the work of the leadership group	
This group of headteachers agreed that evaluation of the work of leadership groups was necessary. The methods discussed ranged across informal discussions day to day with a cross section of staff to formal procedures using an outside consultant. The usual performance indicators for the school were taken as justification that the leaders must be doing a good job. The use of reports and data for the school in making evaluations were given great importance as a basis for discussions about the success of the leadership group.	"We need an external perspective. We get a report back – one for each individual in the team, and one for the team. Individuals use this as appraisal information." "The starting point is school performance – if the school is not performing, we are not performing." "OFSTED can be useful, we also use a staff questionnaire – keep the same one year on year, so that we can make comparisons." "It's done all the time on informal basis – see about one third of staff on corridor at change of lessons – like to move when the kids move." "We infer the senior management team is successful by success of the school."

And finally…



When the cake is baked, it is judged successful if the flavour, consistency and ingredients suit the requirements! The cook does not choose the kitchen, but can supplement the utensils and improve the ingredients. The cake must be mixed and baked with care and attention, and then stored in a way that conserves the freshness. Having made the judgement, the cook will work to improve the recipe to suit changing circumstances.

My confident conclusion is that this study proves that the overriding feature in these schools is that the headteachers become expert chefs in mixing and baking the leadership cake. They decide what cake is needed, and work out the best way of using their kitchen to get that cake on to the table. What they all take is time to reflect on what cake to bake, time to select ingredients, and proportionally far more time in mixing the cake. In some instances, the utensils have been rejected, but more common was the practice of supplementing the utensils and adding new ingredients in order to enable a quality mix overall.

This project has established the complex issue of creating a successful leadership group. The heads involved unanimously called for more research and information on leadership groups in schools. This project, having just scraped the surface, supports their call.

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Acknowledgements

The following schools have supported and contributed to this project. I hope that they have found the experience rewarding, and not too much of a diversion from their core purpose:

- Brooke Weston Technology College, Corby
  Head: Mr P A Simpson
- Bishop Stopford School, Kettering
  Head: Mr J Colquhoun
- Gartree High School, Oadby, Leicestershire
  Head: Mrs D Edwards
- Oldbury Wells School, Bridgnorth
  Head: Mr R Davies
- Bottisham Village College, Bottisham
  Head: Mr P Hains
- Deacon's School, Peterborough
  Head: Mr M B Griffiths
- Bournville School and Sixth Form Centre, Birmingham
  Head: Mrs R Hawker
- Limehurst High School, Loughborough
  Head: Mrs C Jackson
- Littleover Community School, Derby
  Head: Mr D Nichols

I am grateful to those headteachers who became involved in this project – for their honesty, professionalism, care and thoughtfulness. They were supportive to me and each other throughout.

Other research associates at NCSL helped to guide and stimulate this project. My thanks to them, and the tutors, particularly Martin Coles and Amanda Hatchett.

My husband and colleagues at both the schools where I have been employed for the duration of the work have been very interested and supportive. Many thanks to them.

Appendix 1: Methodology

This project took seven beacon secondary schools as case studies to investigate how their leadership teams worked individually and corporately to impact on the confirmed success of the school, and how they gained feedback on their leadership function. The schools were chosen because of the confirmed leadership strengths (from the beacon strengths identified and OFSTED judgements). Their geographical proximity was another guiding criteria for selection. All were mixed comprehensive secondary schools, including one city technology college. They varied in size from approximately 500 to 1,400, and were situated in a broad variety of contexts.

Evidence was collected in two ways. First, by listening to the stories of headteachers in these schools. I visited each person at their school, and led a conversation based on a semi-structured interview. This approach is supported by Johnson (1994) because it can be adapted to the circumstances of the person being interviewed, and is more likely to gain the co-operation of a small number of respondents. The interview focused on issues of organisation and management structure, leadership ethos, individual activities and evaluation of performance. Schools also provided me with documentation that gave more detailed information, and corroborated facts given.

The second phase was a seminar arranged for the headteachers to talk with each other around a number of further issues. The agenda for this meeting focused on building teamwork, creating and communicating the vision, and evaluation of team performance. The purpose of the seminar was to corroborate my understanding gained from the first conversations, widen the questioning of practice and tease out underlying issues that have a major impact on leadership. The discussion was planned to allow reflection and sharing of good practice, together with the power that peer questioning affords between colleagues who are not in competition with each other in their daily lives. The conversation was recorded as a whole by a non-participant, and analysed for contributing issues. It afforded further ‘probing’ of the issues raised in the first part of the research.

Research studies on leadership have been criticised for using headteachers as the sole source of information (Day et al, 2000). However, the purpose of this study was to tease out the thinking on leadership groups, and literature would support the thesis that such thinking about leadership is most likely to reside in the head of the school (MacBeath and Myers, 1999). I was aware that it would be these people that would initiate thinking about the leadership group in the schools, and that it is the headteacher who has the overview of ‘kitchen, utensils, ingredients and cake’.

Given the limited time to carry out the research, the instruments used were deemed to be most likely to produce information that would have clarity and appeal to readers. Information was collected by just one person, reducing the potential for different interpretations. This aspect also enabled professional trusting relationships to be formed, encouraging the sharing of confidential information at times. For this reason, the names of the schools that took part in the research are not published here.