

**University of Nottingham**

**Middle Leadership in Malaysian International Secondary Schools:  
The Intersection of Instructional, Distributed and Teacher Leadership**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines middle leadership in four international secondary schools in Malaysia. It focuses on five main areas; roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement. Data were collected through observations, documentary analysis and 52 semi-structured interviews with four principals, 12 heads of department and 36 teachers.

The empirical data indicate that the middle leaders' roles suffer from lack of clarity, with managerial tasks dominating their job scope. Different role interpretations have led to the development of misunderstanding and uneasy relationships between and among the participants. Despite this, and in contrast to the literature, there is more coordination between the middle leaders and the senior leaders, mainly due to the nature of accountability in private international settings.

The empirical findings show teaching and learning to be the most powerful feature of the four case-study schools. Among all the themes identified, lesson observations are conducted and taken seriously in all the schools. Criticisms about monitoring persist but the general trend is positive. Time constraints, as suggested by international literature, continue to hamper the work of the participating middle leaders.

This thesis holds that autonomy to take and implement decisions is an essential component of distributed leadership. Broadly speaking, the empirical evidence suggests that opportunities for middle leaders and teachers to participate and influence key decisions in their schools are limited. While they claim great autonomy in the domain of the classroom, they report limited satisfactory experience outside it.

The observational findings indicate four departmental models; 'island' & 'shopping mall', in which isolation prevails; 'solar system', with its asymmetrical balance of attention; 'magnet', where a few are attracted and the rest repelled, and 'bicycle wheel', with a hub to which all 'roads' lead. The main significance of this thesis is inter-sectionality, which occurs at the interface between autonomy and expertise. This model suggests that the transition from middle *management* to middle *leadership* is contingent upon the proportional provision of these two constructs. A lack of equilibrium between autonomy and expertise can influence the extent to which middle-level practitioners can be described as *leaders*.

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract,</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments,</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents,</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables,</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Figures,</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Abbreviations,</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION,</b>	<b>1</b>
The Origin of International Schools,	1
Induction,	15
Middle Leadership,	16
Middle Leadership in Malaysia,	21
Instructional Leadership,	21
Distributed Leadership,	23
Teacher Leadership,	25
Research Aims,	27
Research Questions,	27
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW,</b>	<b>30</b>
Middle Leadership,	30
Middle Leadership in Malaysia,	62
Instructional Leadership,	66
Distributed Leadership,	76
Teacher Leadership,	94
Overview,	109
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY,</b>	<b>111</b>
Introduction,	111
Research and Philosophy,	111
Research Approaches,	119
Methods,	124
Sampling,	131

Piloting,	138
Access,	140
Ethics,	142
Data Collection,	145
Trustworthiness,	146
Authenticity,	151
Data Analysis,	153
Overview,	156

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY REPORT SCHOOL A, 157**

Introduction,	157
Methods,	157
English Department,	158
Maths Department,	172
Science Department,	180
Overview,	188

#### **CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY REPORT SCHOOL B, 193**

Introduction,	193
Methods,	193
English Department,	193
Maths Department,	205
Science Department,	215
Overview,	222

#### **CHAPTER SIX: CASE STUDY REPORT SCHOOL C, 225**

Introduction,	225
Methods,	225
English Department,	226
Maths Department,	239
Science Department,	249
Overview,	258

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CASE STUDY REPORT SCHOOL D, 262**

Introduction,	262
Methods,	262
English Department,	263
Maths Department,	276
Science Department,	288
Overview,	297

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION, 300**

Introduction,	300
Instructional Leadership,	300
Distributed Leadership,	314
Teacher Leadership,	327
Roles, Responsibilities and Role Relationships,	338
Conflict Resolution,	346
Overview,	348

## **CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION, 350**

Introduction,	350
Answering the Research Questions,	350
Significance of this Study,	363
Grounded Theory Model: From Middle Management to Middle Leadership,	376
Limitations of the Research,	382
Recommendations for Future Research,	383
Overview,	384

## **REFERENCES, 388**

## **APPENDICES, 407**

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1.1</b>	The range of curricula offered by international schools in Malaysia,	5
<b>Table 1.2</b>	Main contentious areas among key stakeholders,	10
<b>Table 2.1</b>	Ranking of HoDs' most influential role sets,	33
<b>Table 2.2</b>	Middle leaders' managerial tasks,	35
<b>Table 2.3</b>	HoDs' partial priority tasks list,	37
<b>Table 2.4</b>	Lambert's typology of department heads' role functions,	43
<b>Table 2.5</b>	Senior and middle leaders' perceptions of managerial tasks,	44
<b>Table 2.6</b>	Decision-making comparative impact on two secondary schools,	79
<b>Table 2.7</b>	Buckby's reproduced HoDs' leadership involvement results,	80
<b>Table 2.8</b>	Proposed distributed leadership models & patterns,	85
<b>Table 2.9</b>	Four selected distributed leadership models,	87
<b>Table 2.10</b>	Items for teacher leadership variables,	98
<b>Table 2.11</b>	Quantified classroom- and school-based variables by item,	100
<b>Table 2.12</b>	Quantified classroom- and school-based variables by section,	102
<b>Table 2.13</b>	Results of Muijs & Harris's three illustrative case study schools,	104
<b>Table 2.14</b>	Comparing teacher leadership terms,	105
<b>Table 3.1</b>	Thomas's case study comprehensive map,	122
<b>Table 3.2</b>	Punch's grouping of observation methods,	128
<b>Table 3.3</b>	The total population of international schools in Kuala Lumpur,	133
<b>Table 3.4</b>	The stratum of selected international schools,	134
<b>Table 3.5</b>	The tentative stratum of selected international schools,	135
<b>Table 3.6</b>	The ethnic distribution of the sample population,	138
<b>Table 3.7</b>	The final four international secondary schools,	141

<b>Table 3.8</b>	Quantitative terms vs. qualitative equivalents,	146
<b>Table 3.9</b>	Quantitative terms vs. qualitative terms,	147
<b>Table 4.1</b>	School A methods,	158
<b>Table 4.2</b>	School A HoDs' job description categories,	160
<b>Table 4.3</b>	School A instructional monitoring sections,	163
<b>Table 4.4</b>	School A feedback form – observational aspects,	164
<b>Table 4.5</b>	School A instructional band descriptors,	164
<b>Table 4.6</b>	School A performance and characteristics ratings,	165
<b>Table 4.7</b>	School A job descriptions,	167
<b>Table 4.8</b>	Leadership involvement dichotomies,	190
<b>Table 5.1</b>	School B rules & regulations,	194
<b>Table 5.2</b>	School B minutes section headings,	201
<b>Table 5.3</b>	School B observational aspects,	219
<b>Table 6.1</b>	School C HoDs' job description sections,	227
<b>Table 6.2</b>	School C HoDs' scope of responsibilities,	228
<b>Table 6.3</b>	School C teachers' job description,	231
<b>Table 6.4</b>	School C lesson observation sections,	233
<b>Table 7.1</b>	Outline of School D academic block,	263
<b>Table 7.2</b>	HoD job description sections,	264
<b>Table 7.3</b>	HoD responsibilities,	266
<b>Table 7.4</b>	School D formal observation form,	271
<b>Table 7.5</b>	HoD tasks,	278



**Table 7.6** School D teachers' job description sections, 283

**Table 8.1** IL themes and sub-themes, 301

**Table 8.2** IL emergent themes, 301

**Table 8.3** The index of agreement between HoDs & heads, 317

## **List of Figures**

- Figure 1.1** Eight strands of international schools, 2
- Figure 1.2** International schools' distribution across Malaysia's states & territories, 7
- Figure 2.1** PIMRS dimensions, 68
- Figure 2.2** Distributed leadership-culture equation, 91
- Figure 3.1** The main contentious areas in relation to research, 111
- Figure 3.2** Schematic illustration of epistemology & its positivist paradigms, 112
- Figure 3.3** Schematic illustration of epistemology & its interpretivist paradigms, 114
- Figure 3.4** Illustrative conceptualisations of paradigmatic ontological orientations, 115
- Figure 3.5** Paradigmatic illustrations of quantitative & qualitative research strategies, 116
- Figure 3.6** Two knowledge-seeking strategies, 117
- Figure 3.7** Yin's single- & multiple-case designs typology, 123
- Figure 3.8** Credibility and its dimensions in qualitative research, 148
- Figure 3.9** The scale of dependability, 150
- Figure 3.10** Qualitative research evaluation criteria, 151
- Figure 3.11** The relationship between data collection, analysis, interpretation & memoing, 155
- Figure 4.1** School A formal observation process, 166
- Figure 5.1** School B formal observation process, 211
- Figure 6.1** School C formal observation process, 253
- Figure 7.1** School D formal observation process, 270

<b>Figure 7.2</b>	School D leaders' tenure overview,	298
<b>Figure 9.1</b>	The linear relationship between roles, responsibilities and role relationships,	354
<b>Figure 9.2</b>	Inter-sectionality at the four case-study schools,	366
<b>Figure 9.3</b>	Distributed leadership expertise/autonomy taxonomy,	368
<b>Figure 9.4</b>	The interplay between expertise and autonomy (expertonomy),	371
<b>Figure 9.5</b>	The middle leadership formula,	377
<b>Figure 9.6</b>	Middle management,	378
<b>Figure 9.7</b>	Middle leadership,	379
<b>Figure 9.8</b>	The single illustration of middle leadership, inter-sectionality & expertonomy,	381
<b>Figure 9.9</b>	The encapsulation of middle leadership and its essential notions,	385

## Abbreviations

<b>AR</b>	Action Research
<b>BOG</b>	Board of Governors
<b>CAMM</b>	Curriculum Area Middle Managers
<b>CCA</b>	Co-Curricular Activities
<b>CIE</b>	Cambridge International Examinations
<b>CS</b>	Case Study
<b>DL</b>	Distributed Leadership
<b>DP</b>	Diploma Programme
<b>ERA</b>	Education Reform Act
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>FASS</b>	Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Department
<b>HoF</b>	Head of Faculty
<b>HoS</b>	Head of Secondary
<b>IB</b>	International Baccalaureate
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technologies
<b>IGCSE</b>	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>IL</b>	Instructional Leadership
<b>INSET</b>	In-Service Training
<b>KIS</b>	Kitez International School
<b>LAL</b>	Learning Area Leader
<b>LfL</b>	Leadership for Learning
<b>LftM</b>	Leading from the Middle
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MYP</b>	Middle Year Programme
<b>NAIS</b>	National Association of International Schools
<b>NCSL</b>	National College for School Leadership
<b>NESA</b>	Near East South Asia
<b>NCTL</b>	National College for Teaching and Leadership
<b>NQT</b>	Newly Qualified Teacher
<b>OFSTED</b>	Office for Standards in Education
<b>PDC</b>	Professional Development Coordinator
<b>PIMRS</b>	Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale
<b>PYP</b>	Primary Year Programme
<b>RIS</b>	Ruritanian International School
<b>SASS</b>	Schools and Staffing Survey
<b>SBCD</b>	School-based Curriculum Development
<b>SENCO</b>	Special Education Needs Coordinator
<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team
<b>SMT</b>	Senior Management Team
<b>SoW</b>	Scheme of Work
<b>TL</b>	Teacher Leadership

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

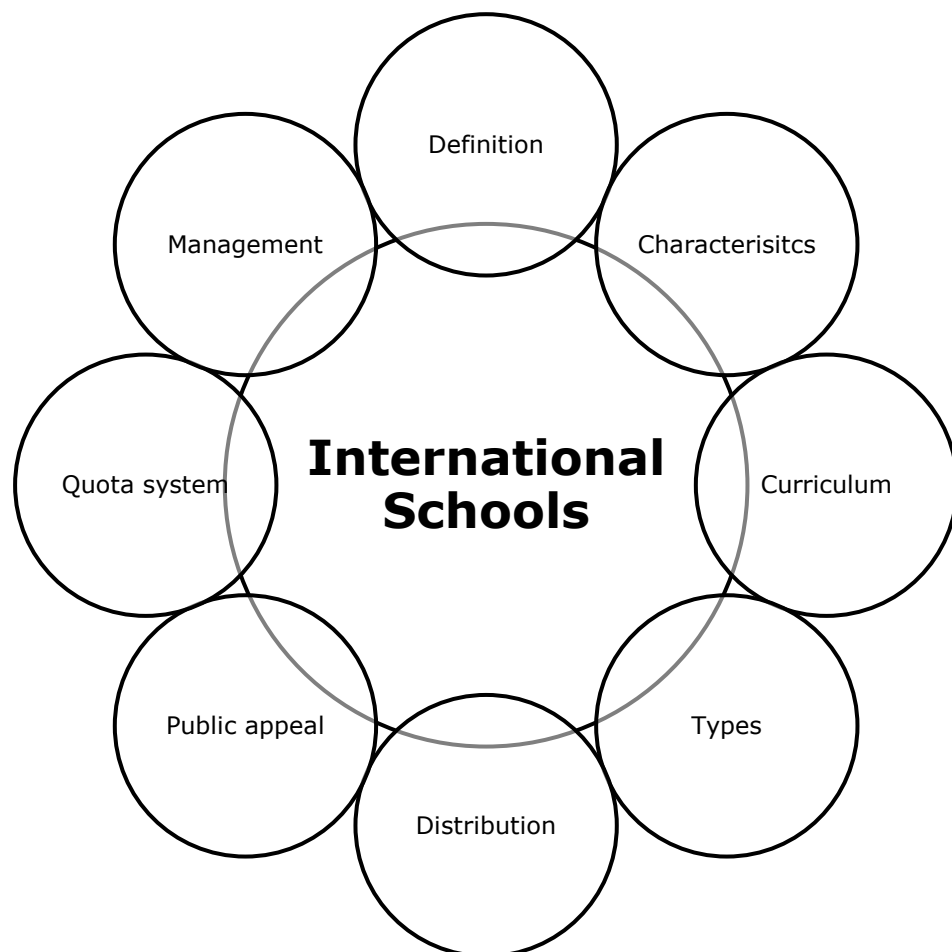
International schools have become a major force in the 21st century. There were more than eight thousand schools worldwide in mid-2016, with English as the medium of instruction ([www.isc-r.com](http://www.isc-r.com)). From their small beginnings of 50 in the 1960s (Jonietz, 1991), they have developed into key players on the social and economic landscape of education; today they serve around 4 million students of diverse backgrounds ([www.isc-r.com](http://www.isc-r.com)), with a turnover of revenue on a multi-billion scale (MacDonald, 2006).

Despite their growing influence (Hallinger & Lee, 2012), international schools used to be known for being secretive in nature (Hayden & Thompson, 1997), allowing limited opportunity for formal research (Bunnell, 2006). Nonetheless, calls from academic circles herald the maturity of international schools, and thus, permit examination (Ellwood, 2004), hence the growing number of research studies (e.g. Song, 2013 in Korea; Khaopa & Kaewmukda, 2010 in Thailand; Bailey, 2015 in Malaysia). It is misleading, though, to rely entirely on international schools to explain their origins. Their birth can hardly be reconciled with spontaneity, but is more likely to make sense against a backdrop of the interface between globalisation and international education.

### **The Origin of International Schools**

There is little agreement on a definition of globalisation (Held & McGrew, 2000), but it can broadly be described as “the global movement of people, goods and ideas” (McMahon, 2011:7). From these three aspects, the element that can help develop and

sustain international schools is the movement of people. However, mobility of people per se is not likely to lead to the creation of international schools. What contributes to it is Gordon & Jones's (undated) final category they use to refer to the expatriates' relocation period, i.e. medium- to long-term stays. In short, unless people decide to plan a stay of reasonable length in a host country, there remains hardly any meaningful possibility of reconciling globalisation with international schools. As suggested above, there is heightened interest in international schools, and eight strands have been identified for discussion (see figure 1.1).



*Figure 1.1: Eight strands of international schools*

The following section discusses each of these strands. Where appropriate, the broader empirical evidence is applied to the context of this study, i.e. Malaysia.

### Definitions

Hayden (2006) regards defining an international school as a 'risky' enterprise because of the (inconsistent) rival attempts and diverse circumstances surrounding international schools. For example, the range of goals pursued by international schools is as diverse as these schools themselves (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). In a large-scale global survey, Hayden et al (2000) found that the student respondents strongly agree that being 'international' means 'NOT to be narrow minded', whereas the teachers believe that being 'interested in what happens in other parts of the world' is most important (p.123), indicating differential perceptions of the meaning of being 'international' between teachers and students worldwide.

In Malaysia, Bailey (2015) found that, of the 16 participants, six (five staff and one student) recognised their school as international, five (one teacher and four students) saw it as Malaysian, with three students describing it as having features of both, and two teachers were unable to describe it. This diversity of opinion reflects the difficulty in describing international schools. Adding a further complication to this uncertainty is that bearing 'international' in the name of a school does not necessarily mean that all aspects of its curriculum are essentially international (Hayden, 2006). The following definition, provided by Hong Kong's Education Department, seems to overlook this 'international' dimension:

[International schools] ... follow a non-local curriculum ... whose students do not sit for the local examinations (e.g. Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination). They are operated with curricula designed for the needs of a particular cultural, racial or linguistic group or for students wishing to pursue their studies overseas. (Education Department, Hong Kong, 1995:4)

Given the sophisticated nature of international schools, it is helpful to understand them by examining their characteristics.

### Characteristics

Schools tend to have a set of common characteristics, but a striking feature of international schools is diversity (see Murphy, 1991; Chesworth & Dawe, 2000; Blandford & Shaw, 2001; Hayden, 2006). However, even this prominent property is subject to variation. For example, in South Korea, despite being called “foreign(ers’) schools” (Song, 2013:144), it is lawfully possible to have an enrolment of 100% local nationals (Ibid). A student participant in Bailey’s (2015:90) Malaysian enquiry expresses doubt about the true ‘international’ identity of her school, as it is heavily influenced by the ‘Malay culture’. Given this, the most airtight feature that distinguishes international schools lies in the statute. For example, it provides them with the opportunity to enrol expatriate children, to apply for student visas (see [www.expatsgomalaysia.com](http://www.expatsgomalaysia.com)), and to enjoy some leeway in connection with curricular constraints. In Malaysia, this latter possibility was achieved via the National Education Act 1996, under Act 550 ([planipolis.iiep.unesco.org](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org)), whereby international schools have been exempt from the obligations of the national curriculum. Thus, this discussion leads to this tentative definition:



An international school is an education provider, which, despite sharing a great deal of common features with national schools, is fundamentally distinct in that it confers statutory rights denied to national schools.

### Curriculum

International schools offer the national curricula of various countries. Of these, the most popular curricula are the UK’s National Curriculum, culminating in the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the International Baccalaureate (IB). In addition to these two curricula, different international schools in Malaysia offer the following programmes (see table 1.1).

➤ American	➤ Islamic
➤ Australian	➤ Canadian
➤ Singapore	➤ Indian
➤ International Primary	

*Table 1.1: The range of curricula offered by international schools in Malaysia (Education Destination Malaysia, 2016:169)*

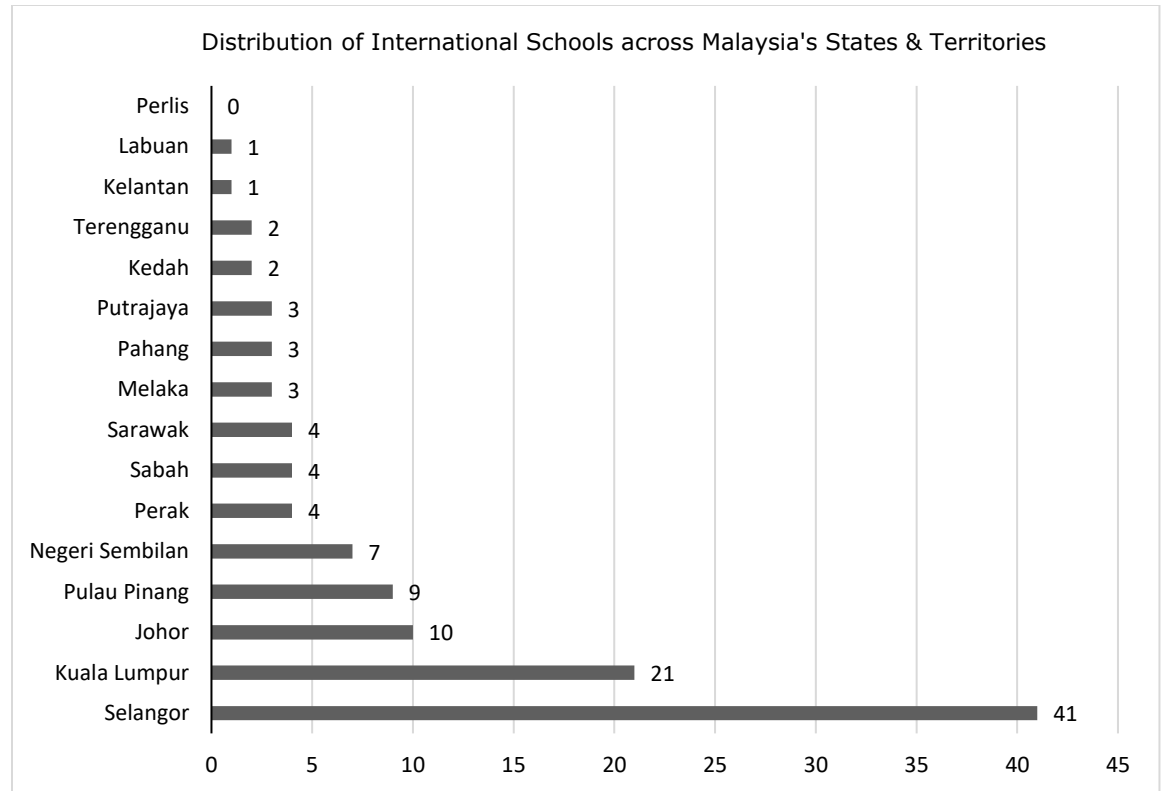
### Types

There are two strands of international schools (Matthews, 1989a). One is motivated by ideology, a.k.a. private not-for-profit (James & Sheppard, 2014), which tend to espouse principles such as universal tolerance and understanding (McMahon, 2011). The other, a.k.a. private for-profit (James & Sheppard, 2014), regards education as a means of obtaining financial gains (see Javadi, 2013 for an example of the latter in Malaysia). The main drawback of Matthews’s (1989a) typology is its discriminatory nature. This may have been the main reason

for supplanting it by a scale to assist in approximating a school's tendency with greater accuracy (Hayden, 2006).

### Distribution

Globally, Asia tops the list with the largest number of schools ([www.isc-r.com](http://www.isc-r.com)). In Hong Kong, the number of schools perceived to be 'international' increased from 7 in 1964 to 61 in 2001 (Yamato & Bray, 2002:27), indicating a growth rate of over 700%. In Malaysia, the exponential growth of private education has afforded the nation enormous capacity for generating revenue (Bajunid, 2008). In 2012, there were 70 international schools, with forecasts of 84 by 2020 ([www.thestar.com.my](http://www.thestar.com.my)), indicating a 20% increase. However, in 2016, the figures have surpassed the target, with one source estimating them to be 115 ([www.schooladvisor.com](http://www.schooladvisor.com)) – suggesting a growth rate of over 36%. The nationwide development has not enjoyed equal geographical distribution, with most schools being in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, as shown in figure 1.2 (see [www.schooladvisor.com](http://www.schooladvisor.com) for further details).



*Figure 1.2: International schools' distribution across Malaysia's states & territories*

As the chart demonstrates, the State of Selangor has attracted the largest number of international schools ( $n=41$ ), followed by 21 schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Outside these two areas, the southern State of Johor, which borders Singapore, hosts the largest number, 10. There are no international schools in the northern State of Perlis, bordering Thailand.

#### Public appeal

This massive expansion is aptly matched by the unprecedented growth of interest in international schools (Hayden et al, 2002). However, it would be a mistake to attribute this to a single reason or simply to the expatriate community. Discussing the link between 'education and socio-political change', Yamato &

Bray (2002:25) mention four reasons for the growth of international schools in Hong Kong; migration, declining birth rates with implications for the parents' expectations of education systems, higher levels of education among parents, and growing wealth. In Thailand, Khaopa & Kaewmukda's (2010) study illustrates that 70% of the international schools are occupied by local nationals for whom English proficiency is key (Gould, 1999; also see Wijewardene, 1999; Deveney, 2000). In South Korea, non-English-medium international schools tend to have the least appeal to students (Song, 2013).

Another reason points to a loss of confidence in national curricula (Cambridge, 2000), where parents tend to perceive them as ineffective (Doherty, 2009), and, in Hong Kong, the local education system is considered to be 'over-academic and inflexible' (Yamato & Bray, 2002:30). In addition, some parents choose to base their choice on the assumption that an international curriculum facilitates employability (Gould, 1999). Ramey (2013:12) claims that the English medium of instruction 'is the major reason local Malaysian parents want their children to attend them'. This remark, however, contrasts with Bailey's (2015:90) finding that 'staff members were more preoccupied with the importance of the English language to the school than were the students'.

This understanding, and the ones cited above, is consistent with Hayden et al's (2000:112) enquiry in which, although from a generic perspective of 'second language competence', the participating international school teachers accorded the importance of fluency in a second language, e.g. English, a

slightly higher mean grade (2.01), compared to the participating students (1.92). Linguistic considerations aside, the main reasons for the Malaysian students, and by extension their parents, for attending international schools is twofold. First, the international schools provide 'access to higher education abroad' (Bailey, 2015:90), and second, in the words of Alicia, a pseudonym for a student participant, they can prepare her 'so that she would not experience culture shock when she went to university overseas' (Ibid: 94). To these, discontent with the shifting national curriculum can be added; 'They [international schools] offer a better alternative than the unstable education policies and undedicated teachers that plague government schools' (Sara, a pseudonym for a student participant in Bailey's (2015:90) enquiry).

#### Quota system

This is a mechanism to regulate the enrolment of local nationals into international schools. It intends to achieve an 'optimum' balance between the expatriate community and the local population (Hayden, 2006). Until recently, Malaysian international schools were legally bound to observe a 40% limit on local nationals ([www.schoolmalaysia.com](http://www.schoolmalaysia.com)). However, this decision was revoked ([www.thestar.com.my](http://www.thestar.com.my)), which led to a significant growth in international schools ([www2.nst.com.my](http://www2.nst.com.my)), and an increase in the proportion of local students. According to Ramey (2013), 43% of international students are local Malaysians, occasionally becoming a majority (see Javadi, 2014). Bailey (2015) reports the Malaysian student population at her researched international school to be 'over 70%', which consists of the Chinese Malaysians, as the largest ethnic group,

followed by the Malays and the Indian Malaysians. Such local-oriented ratios are not exclusive to Malaysia. Using data from the Education Department in 1995, Yamato & Bray (2002) report that Hong Kong's international schools' balance of student population is 47% expatriates and 53% locals, of which 26% of the latter figure are returned emigrants.

### Management

There is a growing consensus on the complex nature of leadership and management in international schools. These originate in a number of issues, involving all the stakeholders at different levels (TES, 2005). Blandford & Shaw (2001) offer a useful map of these contentions (see table 1.2).

Parents	Students	Teachers	Heads	Governors	Curriculum	Culture	Market
Expectations: high, varied	High mobility	High turnover	Influenced by micropolitics; unclear role boundary with BOG	Interference in school operations; mobile membership	Conflicts with host-country education laws	Diversity at all levels	Competition for higher intake
Issues							

*Table 1.2: Main contentious areas among key stakeholders*

Parents wield great power in international schools. From this perspective, Lee et al (2012) identify two sets of leadership challenges in Asia Pacific; environmental factors and organisational factors (p.295). One of the constituents of environmental factors is 'parents and community'. Speaking in the context of IB, the authors highlight the conflict between East Asian parents' 'orientation towards exam results, teacher-directed instruction and focus on learning subject content' and IB's emphasis on 'student-directed, process-directed, "deep learning" approach' (p.298).

Caffyn (2010) probes the relationship between location and micropolitics in two international schools with 'considerable fluidity of staff and management' (p.322). In Kitez International School (KIS) (a pseudonym), located in 'an ex-soviet country close to the Ural mountains' (p.322), he identifies three 'effects of location on micropolitics': campus structure, distance from culture and enclaves (p.329). As for Ruritanian International School (RIS) (a pseudonym), located in Northern Europe, he identifies environment, culture, clientele and interaction (p.329). The issues of 'campus structure' and 'environment' provide useful insights, as Harris (2008:40) identifies 'distance', 'structure' and 'culture' as barriers to distributed leadership. Caffyn (2010:328) describes the KIS system of 'split' campus as a facilitating factor for the growth of 'fragmentation ... isolation ... limited involvement [and] weak communication'. It is obvious that the two-campus situation has had an enormous impact on the culture and the development of micropolitics at KIS. Caffyn's account of RIS has cultural and micropolitical similarities to KIS, having been caused by the school's architecture, designed 'based on dividing people into clusters of classrooms and blocks' (p.330).

Challenges to leadership at international schools are varied. Mobility can be considered as a contributory factor to, as well as a consequence of, leadership instability at international schools, which can extend to two groups; parents and students on the one hand, and principals and teachers, on the other.

### *Mobility of parents and students*

Chesworth & Dawe (2000) describe parents as 'internationally mobile' when they are continually relocating with their children in their wake. Student mobility, which can amount to 35% annually (Matthews, 1989b), is defined as the 'total movement in and out of schools by pupils other than at the usual times of joining and leaving' (Ofsted<sup>1</sup>, 2002). While this understanding is true for some international school students, it may as well apply to students who choose to leave their schools at the end of an academic year. Broadly speaking, two reasons can be envisaged for the mobility of parents and students. The first reason to consider is school-based. Earlier, it was argued that an appeal of international schools for parents, among many reasons, is the opportunity they provide for communication in English (e.g. Hayden et al, 2000; Khaopa & Kaewmukda, 2010). Failure to respond to this expectation may result in child withdrawal, prematurely or at the end of the academic year. The second reason is external to schools, and it usually pertains to parents' employment. A premature withdrawal of a child may occur when the working parents fail to complete their contracts. An end-of-academic-year withdrawal is more likely when the working parents intend to relocate after the completion of their contracts.

### *Mobility of principals*

Mobility among principals and teachers is commonly referred to as 'turnover'. This can be the consequence of conflicts between three major forces; teachers, leaders (senior and middle), and,

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<sup>1</sup> The Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) is a national body [in the UK] and inspects schools on a regular cycle. (Harris, 2008:76)



in the context of international schools, the owners. There is a high turnover among the principals at international schools. Hawley's (1994) US-based study reviewed the headship history of 336 principals in the 1980s. In one year alone, one third of the heads had chosen to quit their positions; it also demonstrated that, on average, international school heads would not stay beyond 3 years, with the contract of 80% of them terminated (Littleford, 1999). In their reduced report of 'leadership dynamics' in an American international school (out of three), Murakami-Ramalho & Benham (2010:632) describe the dismissal of a long-serving principal after 'almost 20 years ... for undisclosed reasons', indicating leadership instability for even well-established principals.

In his unpublished work, describing leadership at his international school in Malaysia, Javadi (2013) reports the termination of three principals. The main reason for this, and also mentioned by Littleford (1999), lies in the uneasy relationships between the principals and the members of the governing board.

### *Mobility of teachers*

There is also a high turnover of teachers in international schools. In his small-scale study, Hardman (1997:111) found that, out of the 30 teacher participants, as many as 89% 'had worked at two or more international schools', while Hayden & Thompson (1998) put this figure at nearly 40%. Odland & Ruzicka's (2009) study of teacher turnover, within 'the entire population of teachers in the CIS [Council of International Schools]' (p.9), highlights eight areas of contention, which the authors divide into 'Type 1' and

'Type 2 causal factors' (see p.23). There are three reasons under 'Type 1', which, in rank order, includes administrative leadership, which constitutes lack of senior leadership communication, support and involvement of teachers in decision-making processes, compensation and personal factors. Under 'Type 2', the authors mention, in rank order, private ownership, misrepresentation at the recruitment stage, conflict with leaders, contractual issues, and dissatisfaction with colleagues. These eight areas place teachers in difficult situations, which involve owners, school leaders and colleagues.

Mancuso et al (2010) conducted their study in the Near East South Asia (NESA) region, which stretches from 'Greece and Libya in the west to Bangladesh in the east, and includes 87 international schools in 24 countries' (p.308). They constructed their survey-based enquiry upon two questions. The teachers' responses for the second question were divided into three categories; teacher characteristics, school characteristics and organisational conditions. The authors divide the 'organisational conditions' category into three sub-sets; satisfaction with salary, supportive leadership, and perceptions of faculty influence. The findings, among others, show that those teachers who perceived their involvement in decision-making processes to be limited, were more likely to move than their counterparts who held opposite views (see p.316). The findings of this category (organisational conditions) overlap, to a large measure, with Odland & Ruzicka's (2009) results above, and they resonate with the principles of distributed and teacher leadership.

Bailey's (2015) enquiry in Malaysia describes the motives behind teachers' opting for a career in an international school context as 'a snap decision – wanting to travel, experience a change or a challenge ...' (p.90). These remarks point to the role of chance, uncertainty and adventure, and serve to highlight the significance of induction for international school staff, which is discussed below.

### **Induction**

In the context of leadership, Bush (2008:65) defines induction as 'the process by which new incumbents become familiar with the context in which they are leading, including the school culture'. This definition can also extend to teachers, and their teaching role. Mukhopadhyay (2005:114) regards induction as 'an important investment on staff', the 'proper' conduct of which can assist new employees, 'regardless of ... seniority' (Trethowan, 1991:52) to 'understand and get accustomed to the culture of the institution' (Mukhopadhyay, 2005:114). Both Bush (2008), and Mukhopadhyay (2005), point to the role of 'culture', which, in the context of international schools, takes diverse and multiple characteristics. In this context, Stirzaker (2004) stresses the importance for the employees of having access to 'positive' and 'truthful' information so that they can 'make a sound decision about whether the transition [to international school settings] is right for them' (p.36). This advice, however, contrasts with Odland & Ruzicka's (2009) finding about the unfortunate experiences of some of their respondents who were affected by misrepresentations at the recruitment stage.

There are several suggestions for types of induction programmes, ranging from formal training (Bush, 2008), to mentoring a young teacher by a more experienced colleague (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). However, these are examples of post-employment training. In the light of the accounts above, induction *prior to* recruitment takes prominence. Recruitment herein refers to the pre-application stage for work at an international school. Stirzaker (2004) suggests two useful strategies for existing and new international school teachers and leaders; pre-induction visits and pen-pals. The former strategy, remarks Stirzaker, is 'good but possibly not very practical'; alternatively, using a pen-pal permits exchange of 'information about the culture of the host community' (p.47). A more practical and cost-effective method, however, is to sign up for websites which provide information about international schools, such as the International School Community (<https://internationalschoolcommunity.com>). The 'School Comments' tab of this website allows the registered users to browse comments and compare school salaries with a view to making informed decisions.

### **Middle Leadership**

Partial privatisation of education worldwide has had a crucial impact on the management of schools, with a greater emphasis on personalised learning. Therefore, instruction and assessment tend to be delivered in a way that meets individual needs. This is attempted by differentiating input or streaming students based on ability. In international schools, this is important because each student is a fee-paying 'customer'. This is evident in the amount of time that 'busy' middle leaders spend with

individual students, which, according to Wise & Bennett (2003), can range 'between one and five hours' (p.17). Responding to these individual and diverse needs has gradually revealed the limited capacity of those principals who wish to manage their schools single-handedly. Lynch (2012:35) recounts the story of one such principal who succeeded in sustaining his workload for seven years only to face premature retirement on health grounds. Similar anecdotes of this sort have highlighted the importance of middle leadership.

The significance of the shift of attention from the 'top' to the 'middle' has been captured by numerous studies. A review of the existing literature yields a whole raft of themes pertinent to the practice of middle leadership, distinguished below:

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- Role relationships
- Instructional engagement, and
- Leadership involvement

#### Middle leaders: roles and responsibilities

There is little consensus on a definition for middle leadership (e.g. Hannay & Ross, 1999; Weller, 2001). Gunter (2001) and Bush (2003a) mention various titles used to refer to middle leaders. This thesis focuses on middle leaders in their capacity as heads of department (HoDs), who are 'responsible for an aspect of the academic curriculum ... and are expected to have responsibility for one or more teachers' (Wise, 2001:333).

Despite middle leaders' diversity of responsibilities, their leadership role was not immediately recognised. For example, some studies were more cautious in their assessment by

describing the middle leaders' role as undervalued or underutilised (e.g. Koehler, 1993; Turner, 1996). However, with the passage of time, middle leaders came to be regarded as 'key figures' (Busher & Harris, 1999:307), who play a 'crucial role' (Bennett et al, 2003b:1), and are 'central to the improvement of educational standards' (Bush, 2003a:1). In England, middle leaders are accorded high status, which 'is a permanent one that carries a fairly substantial salary increase ... and a small, extra amount of non-teaching time' (Bolam & Turner, 2003:135).

Hierarchically, the HoDs 'are not part of the senior management team' (Busher & Harris, 1999:306), as are 'principals or deputy headteachers' (Busher et al, 2007:405), but they have 'formal responsibilities and duties of leadership and management and sit between senior leadership and teachers' (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012:57).

There is some confusion about the use of 'management' or 'leadership' for practitioners in the 'middle'. Works published in the late 1990s and early 2000s distinguish between an era of middle management and a new dawn of middle leadership. For example, Busher & Harris (1999) differentiate between a period of descriptive/prescriptive research when 'the traditional role of academic middle managers was that of subject leader' (Bush, 2003a:1). This approach was counterbalanced by a normative view which Bush (Ibid: 4) labels 'towards middle level leadership', where the emphasis shifted to embracing the leadership capacity of the middle managers. Hence, in line with Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham's (2007:423) assertion that "'middle leader" is the term most recently applied to teachers',

the terms middle leadership and middle leader(s) will be employed in this thesis, and, interchangeably, with HoD(s).

#### Middle leaders: role relationships

There is considerable evidence that attests to the existence of tension among school administrators. Bush (2003a:2) says that middle leaders often find themselves in the 'uncomfortable position of being sandwiched between the conflicting requirements of the senior leadership team and their departmental colleagues'. However, there is also some evidence that, facing this dilemma, the HoDs choose to ally themselves with the teachers (Busher, 2005).

However, this does not mean that all HoDs and senior managers are relentlessly engaged in tense relationships. In an enquiry in England, 'in one school most of the heads of department interviewed felt that relationships with the senior management team were very good' (Brown et al, 2000:251). Such favourable reports are extremely limited, though, in comparison with the abundant evidence that points to the contrary.

#### Middle leaders: instructional engagement

There are various ways in which HoDs can engage in leading teaching and learning. In educational leadership and management, this aspect is commonly known as 'instructional leadership'. Most literature about this model of leadership focuses on the principals and the method of their engagement with the teachers. However, it can also extend to the HoDs as the leaders of their respective departments. This matter is evident in Leithwood et al's (1999:8) conception of instructional leadership when they say that 'the critical focus for attention by

*leaders* is the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students' (emphasis added).

Instructional leadership is a well-researched educational theory (e.g. Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Blasé & Blasé, 2002), encompassing aspects pertinent to HoDs' instructional leadership role (e.g. Lambert, 1975; Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Wise & Bush, 1999). Southworth (2002:84), for example, discusses three key features of instructional leadership; modelling, monitoring, as well as professional dialogue and discussion. Of these features, monitoring has been identified as 'the most controversial' aspect (Bush, 2003a:4), also highlighted by the Office for Standards in Education (see Ofsted, 1997: Introduction) in England and Wales as one of 'the several areas of concern in school middle management' (Garrett et al, 1999:13).

Another barrier hampering middle leaders' successful execution of their responsibilities is time constraint. Shortage of time is one of the recurring complaints of the middle leaders, as highlighted by Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989), researched by Glover and his colleagues (1998), and reported as a continuing problem by Wise & Bush (1999).

#### Middle leaders: leadership involvement

Recalling Wise's (2001:333) definition, HoDs are 'responsible for an aspect of the academic curriculum ... and are expected to have responsibility for one or more teachers'. Implicit in this definition is the anticipation that the HoDs are engaged in leading their departments *and* their schools. However, HoDs do not occupy an official position in the SMT (Busher & Harris,



1999), which may hinder their active participation in key decision-making processes of their schools. Broadly speaking, HoDs are expected to lead their departments to accomplish tasks classified by Wise & Bush (1999) as academic, administrative, managerial and educational. The Oxford dictionary (2016) defines 'accomplish' as 'to succeed in doing or completing something', and it comprises two parts; implementation and success. The question here is not about the tasks HoDs implement, but rather about how successfully they implement them, which this thesis intends to understand.

### **Middle Leadership in Malaysia**

This author was able to identify only two complementary studies in Malaysia. The first (unpublished) study explores middle leadership in an international secondary school in southern Malaysia (Javadi, 2014). The author acknowledges that monitoring plays a major role in pedagogic effectiveness. However, three barriers undermine this; shortage of time, lack of training, and leadership apathy. The second research is a mixed-methods enquiry (Ghavifekr et al, 2014), which investigates the issues and challenges of HoDs 'as transformational leaders' in five Chinese primary schools in Kuala Lumpur. Through interviews, the authors identify several barriers to the effective performance of the HoDs; workload, HoDs' relationships with teachers, and with parents.

### **Instructional Leadership**

Hallinger (2005:227) declares instructional leadership (IL) to be 'the most frequently studied model of school leadership' over the past quarter of a century. Originally developed in the USA, IL is

principally concerned with teaching and learning (Bush & Middlewood, 2013), as well as 'the professional learning of teachers [and] student growth' (Southworth, 2002:79). Similarly, Hopkins (2003:56) remarks that IL 'is about creating opportunities for both students and teachers'. From the leadership perspective, IL differs from other leadership models (Bush, 2014b), as it 'focuses on the direction of influence, rather than its nature and source' (Bush & Middlewood, 2013:15; see also Bush & Glover, 2002).

While the benefits of principals' engagement with instruction are many (e.g. Blasé & Blasé, 2002), it is a complex and demanding model, which, according to Southworth (2002:81), many 'headteachers or other leaders' may not be able to fulfil, or it may entail ambiguities (Hallinger, 2005), under-engagement (e.g. Cuban, 1988 in the USA; Hallinger & Lee, 2014 in Thailand), as well as lack of understanding of IL (Hill, 2001; Elmore, 2003; Bush & Heystek, 2006; Grant, 2006). Hallinger & Lee (2014) liken heads, for example, in Malaysia, to government officials who tend to devote more time to managing the organisation than to instruction. In addition, Bush (2011) expresses concern that IL is not inclusive of all school aspects.

The IL trajectory has not been smooth. In the mid-1990s, it was declared 'a dying paradigm' (Leithwood, 1994) because of (a) its over-emphasis on heads at the expense of excluding other staff, and (b) its concentration on teaching rather than learning (Bush, 2014b). Despite these flaws, it is very difficult to overlook the significance of IL, as it deals with teaching and learning (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). As a result, Hallinger (2009) has announced

IL's revival in the form of "leadership for learning", a.k.a. "learning-focused leadership" (Knapp et al, 2003) (LfL).

Marsh (2012) defines LfL as emancipatory since it creates purposeful opportunities for school players to interact and focus on educational enhancement. This re-conceptualisation of IL is a response to Bush's (2014b) concerns above, as LfL tends to emphasise learning, and embraces the broader participation of stakeholders, such as middle leaders and teachers, important agencies for LfL (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). This point links IL to distributed leadership as 'instructional leadership could emanate from many different sources, and be seen as one aspect of a distributed approach' (Bush, 2014b), whereby middle leaders and teachers are empowered 'to take a direct lead in teaching and learning within a trusting and collaborative culture' (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2010:157).

### **Distributed Leadership**

Interest in distributed leadership (DL) has grown considerably in the past two decades (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Bush, 2013), which, according to Harris (2013), is 'variously enacted in schools and school systems' (p.545).

DL lacks definitional consensus (e.g. Bennett et al, 2003a:2). Speaking in the context of DL, Spillane (2005) puts leadership practice centre stage, considering it as the outcome of the interactions between leaders, followers and their situation, focused on 'the execution of particular leadership tasks' (Spillane et al, 2004:10). In Gronn's (2000:324) view, leadership is 'fluid and emergent', with 'multiple sources of influence within any organisation ...' (Harris, 2013:545), which requires the

'engagement of many people in leadership activity' (Harris, 2004:14), leading to the opportunity of 'maximising the human capacity within the organisation' (Ibid).

Organisationally, DL provides opportunities for school improvement and enhanced student outcomes (Silins & Mulford, 2002; Harris, 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). This aspect of DL, however, has generated mixed reactions. Anderson et al (2009:135), for example, are sceptical that 'specific leadership distribution patterns and student achievement results' can lead to 'clear guidelines for practice'.

There are also some criticisms about DL (e.g. Hatcher, 2005; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2009). Hartley (2010:271), for example, expresses doubt that 'distributed leadership has a direct causal effect on pupils' achievement'. He regards DL's popularity as 'pragmatic ... to ease the burden of over-worked headteachers' (Ibid). Harris (2010:55) reflects that, for these critics, DL means more work for teachers, work standardisation and "'old managerialism" in a contemporary guise'. In contrast, Leithwood et al (2007), and Pricewaterhouse-Coopers (2007), report that, not only has the pressure on school leaders increased, but it has also diversified.

One issue that 'looms over distributed leadership' (Harris, 2013:546) concerns power, which according to Lumby (2013:583), 'surfaces only superficially, if at all, in much of the literature'. When discussing 'distributing' leadership, two questions can be asked:

- What exactly is distributed?
- Who distributes it?

This thesis holds that DL encompasses an essential component; autonomy. Therefore, when discussing 'distribution', it is autonomy that is distributed. Autonomy equates to freedom of action, which constitutes the power of taking independent decisions and of implementing those decisions. There is evidence that successful leadership distribution requires the principal's endorsement (e.g. Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005). Although Bush (2013:544) detaches DL from the principals' 'positional authority', Harris (2013) rejects the notion of incompatibility between formal and informal leadership.

There are some barriers to DL, such as 'the existing authority structure in schools' (Bush & Middlewood, 2013:22), as well as Harris's (2008) triple notions of distance, culture and structure. Nevertheless, *the* most challenging barrier to DL is accountability. According to Hopkins & Jackson (2003:102), DL 'requires shelter from external pressures and accountabilities', as it is 'premised on trust' (MacBeath, 2005:353). Bush (1997:73) cautions that 'head's accountability [may] lead to a substantially modified version of collegiality in most schools and colleges'. Harris (2008:68) states that 'simply distributing responsibility, without the associated accountability for decision-making, is unlikely to be effective and indeed, could be counterproductive'.

### **Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership (TL) is inextricably linked to DL (Harris, 2005b), sharing common tenets (Harris, 2008). Despite this

conceptual proximity, TL tends to be 'narrower' as it 'concerns exclusively with the leadership roles of teaching staff' (Muijs & Harris, 2007:112). However, this connection is essentially reciprocal. This understanding may serve to explain why, in order to learn about DL, one has to begin from TL (Harris, 2005a). One of these principles, as noted earlier, is decision-making authority. In their commissioned study, Harris & Day (2003:94) introduce several strategies used by the participating principals, including 'involving others in decision-making processes'. The other crucial element is the authority to convert decisions into action; 'For teacher leadership to be maximised there has to be shared values and goals with the ability to take action' (Harris, 2003b:77).

Leithwood et al (2003) divide TL into formal and informal. Formal TL comprises roles and responsibilities that are carried out by HoDs, for example. Informal TL is exercised by teachers by 'sharing their expertise, volunteering for new projects and bringing new ideas to the school' (p.187). To these, organisational growth (Harris, 2003b), increased teachers' work satisfaction and motivation (Lieberman et al, 2000), and higher levels of retention (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) can be added. Conversely, it is likely to discourage teacher absenteeism (Sickler, 1988) and alienation (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Despite these perceived benefits, Leithwood et al (2007:50) remark that 'good teachers are already busy and may be reluctant to take on new functions'.

Several barriers to the growth and development of TL have been identified, with considerable overlaps with DL. Additional

obstacles to TL, though, include shortage of time and lack of role clarity.

### **Research Aims**

This study has the same focus as that of Busher et al (2007:406); 'This paper has chosen to focus its discussion on the work of those middle leaders who might be referred to as subject leaders or heads of subject departments'. Their study, and this thesis, can be construed as a response to legitimate concerns about the limited scope of research about middle leaders (e.g. Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Brown et al, 2000; Bolam & Turner, 2003). However, interest in research on middle leadership has grown since these concerns were first expressed. Despite this increase, some countries, as well as some sectors of education, remain under-represented, most notably middle leadership in international secondary schools in Malaysia.

From this perspective, this thesis serves four major goals. First, it provides data about middle leadership practice; second, it collects information from the relatively emergent setting of international schools; third, the findings reflect middle leadership practice in Malaysia; finally, it is informed by three key educational theories; instructional, distributed and teacher leadership models. To achieve this end, the following research questions are addressed.

### **Research Questions**

To gain an in-depth insight into middle leadership practice in the selected international secondary schools in Malaysia, the following questions have been formulated:

*1. What are the roles, responsibilities and role relationships of middle leaders in the selected international schools?*

This question has a descriptive nature as it attempts to provide an overview of the HoDs' scope of roles and responsibilities.

*2. How, and to what extent, are middle leaders involved in the leadership of the selected international schools?*

The use of 'how' and 'to what extent' phrases in this question, and the following questions, is to acknowledge and reiterate that practices associated with middle, instructional, distributed and teacher leadership may vary in accordance with the contextual contingencies. Question 2 encompasses two dimensions. The depth aspect is explored through the 'how' question, and the 'extent' question is used to assess the breadth of the HoDs' engagement with leadership of their schools.

*3. How, and to what extent, are the leadership practices undertaken by the middle leaders linked to teaching and learning in the selected international schools?*

Question 3 constitutes a dual focus. At the broader level, the attention is to record, as much as possible, the leadership practices of the HoDs. At the finer level, the focus is to identify, select and code those practices under themes that are directly linked to teaching and learning, i.e. instructional leadership. This stage may also illuminate the barriers, if any, for HoDs to carry out their duties.

*4. How, and to what extent, can the practices of middle leaders in the selected international schools be understood through distributed and/or teacher leadership?*



Question 4 seeks to comprehend and define the HoDs' leadership practices within the theoretical framework of distributed and/or teacher leadership.

The explanation above serves to justify the sequence of these questions, which move along a concrete-abstract continuum. The starting point involves describing the nature of the HoDs' roles, responsibilities and role relationships. Question 2 addresses the depth and breadth of the HoDs' leadership involvement. At a less concrete level, this understanding broadens to discuss more conceptual themes pertinent to instructional leadership. At a more abstract level, the materials serve to portray the landscape of formal leadership distribution, in the form of middle leadership, and informal leadership distribution, in the form of teacher leadership, in accordance with the ways in which participants in the selected international schools have chosen to exercise them. At its most abstract, the synthesis of instructional leadership findings with those of distributed leadership helps to determine the extent and scope of the presence or absence of middle leadership. Placing distributed leadership as the final question is supported by Harris's (2005a) assertion that DL 'is primarily a way of analysing leadership activity in schools rather than describing actual practice' (p.166). The next chapter provides a review of the literature.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The essence of this chapter is defined by the components of this thesis's title; middle leadership, Malaysia, international secondary schools, instructional, distributed and teacher leadership theories. These inter-connected components situate middle leadership at the centre of a contextual and theoretical intersection, leading to conceptual and definitional complications, and the challenge is to unwind this inextricably interwoven conception with all the overlaps involved. To achieve this end, this chapter begins by examining international and regional empirical data on middle leadership. Where available, these are extended to the Malaysian and international school contexts. This is followed by exploring instructional, distributed and teacher leadership theories, complemented by data pertinent to middle leadership, international schools and Malaysia.

### **Middle Leadership**

This thesis intends to engage with heads of department (HoDs) who are 'responsible for an aspect of the academic curriculum ... and are expected to have responsibility for one or more teachers' (Wise, 2001:333). Thus, five themes can be identified:

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- Role relationships
- Instructional engagement and
- Leadership involvement

The following section examines each theme in detail.

## Roles

In the mid-1990s, Ofsted (1996) in England defined middle managers as 'teachers [who] carry responsibility for the work of other staff' (article 148:43). Busher & Harris (1999) regard HoDs as 'middle managers', who, as subject experts, 'are responsible for an aspect of the academic curriculum, including department and ... are expected to have responsibility for one or more teachers' (Wise, 2001:333-334). This definition in England agrees with Wong et al's (2010) understanding in Hong Kong as they define middle leaders as 'teachers who take up formal administrative positions such as ... chair of subject panels' (p.63). Similarly, Gurr & Drysdale (2012) in Australia define middle leaders 'as those leaders who have significant responsibility for specific areas within a school ... [e.g.] head of department' (p.57), which coheres with the definition provided for middle leaders in this thesis.

The HoDs have been 'increasingly acknowledged to be key figures' (Busher & Harris, 1999:307) with great capacities for influencing 'the quality of teaching and learning' and 'classroom practices' (Harris et al, 2001:84). In England, the HoDs play 'a crucial role in the effective operation of the work of secondary school departments' (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989:98). In China, the HoDs enjoy a highly respected position and tend to be 'experienced teachers' with a 'lifelong commitment in one school' (Tam, 2010:374). While this eastern understanding largely matches the western view, it departs from it as the latter extends to 'the ability to manage and lead a team' (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989:98).

HoDs do not work in isolation, and despite their perceived importance, organisationally, they reside at the centre with a “bridging or broking” (Glover et al, 1998:281) function, which renders them as translators, and perhaps interpreters, of ‘the perspectives and policies of senior staff into the practices of individual classrooms’ (Busher & Harris, 1999:307). In Jarvis’s (2008) enquiry, the head of English department at ‘The Royal’ (a pseudonym), ‘a girls’ state grammar school’ (p.25), describes herself as a “conduit” (p.27), indicating a feeling of powerlessness among the HoDs. Similarly, in New Zealand, Fitzgerald (2009:58) reflects the view of a social sciences head of faculty (HoF)<sup>2</sup> where s/he describes themselves as ‘a conduit between teachers and the boss [principal]’

The ‘middle’ position of the HoDs highlights the importance of role sets and their potential influence on middle leaders. Role set can be defined as ‘a range of different people’ that the HoDs engage with in order to carry out their responsibilities (Wise & Bennett, 2003:25). Wise & Bush (1999:187) suggest the following groups to be middle leaders’ role sets:

- Department members
- Principals and the SMT
- Students
- Advisers and inspectors
- Subject associations
- Other teaching staff in the school
- Parents and guardians
- School governors

The most relevant role sets comprise subject teachers, senior leaders, parents and governors of private international schools.

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<sup>2</sup> A head of faculty (HoF) is responsible for a group of subjects (Fitzgerald, 2009) and may lead a large number of staff (Glover et al, 1998).

Drawing on earlier studies (Wise, 1999; Wise & Bush, 1999), Wise (2001) announces that, of all the role sets above, departmental teachers have the strongest influence on middle leaders; 'More than 90 percent of respondents place them [teachers] in their [HoDs] top three influences' (p.337), followed by senior leaders and students (Wise & Bush, 1999). Table 2.1 displays the overall ranking of all the role sets reported by Wise & Bush (1999:187):

	Percentage of valid responses indicating group as most influential
	Overall ranking
<b>Departmental staff</b>	58.8
<b>Senior leaders</b>	21.7
<b>Students</b>	5.5
<b>Advisers/inspectors</b>	3.2
<b>Other teaching staff</b>	2.9
<b>Subject association</b>	1.9
<b>Parents/guardians</b>	0.6
<b>Governors</b>	0

*Table 2.1: Ranking of HoDs' most influential role sets*

It is important to note the contextual differences between the authors' study and this thesis. While it is conceivable to continue to assume that departmental members and senior leaders have a great influence on middle leaders in international schools, more prominence may be attached to the roles of parents (e.g. Lee et al, 2012) and governors or owners, especially when considering the latter group's effect on principal turnover (e.g. Hawley, 1994; Littleford, 1999; Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010; Javadi, 2013; James & Sheppard, 2014). According departmental staff more significance, while being organisationally accountable to the senior leaders, entails complications, most notably divergent views of the HoDs' role. Rosenfeld et al (2009) describe the difference in role conception

between principals and HoDs in Australia as 'stark' (p.8). For these HoDs, 'instructional leadership' and 'commitment to a particular subject area' have priority (Ibid). For the principals, however, departmental loyalty is less important (Ibid). This departmental 'tug of war' in Australia is consistent with the earlier findings about commitment to subject areas in England (Wise, 1999; Wise & Bush, 1999; Wise, 2001). Moreover, lack of coherent role understanding is not limited to the senior leaders and the HoDs; it also extends to teachers. Jarvis (2008) in England reports department members' 'ignorance about what a head of department's role encompasses ... [with] large areas of the job ... invisible to [the teachers]'

(p.27). Tam (2010:383) in China concludes that 'the role of an HoD is extremely challenging', as confirmed by international perspectives presented here. In the view of Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989), a factor, among others, affecting the successful departmental performance was 'uncertainty as to what the role of the head of department entailed' (p.107). They add that many middle leaders 'had not thought clearly about the role or what it involved in its entirety' (Ibid). This is reminiscent of Ribbins's (2007) statement that 'we should not assume that just because time has changed things are necessarily significantly different' (p.27).

### Responsibilities

Four parameters can be considered about HoDs' responsibilities; the nature, the scope, the priorities, and the perspectives of the senior leaders vis-à-vis the middle leaders. These are discussed below.

### *Middle leaders' responsibilities: the nature*

In their enquiry into middle leadership in England, Wise & Bush (1999) used responses provided by middle leaders and principals to divide the 16 suggested middle leadership tasks into four categories of academic, administrative, managerial and educative. Of these categories, all the responsibilities under 'managerial tasks' are highly relevant to this thesis, and are shown in Table 2.2.

<b>Managerial tasks</b>
Monitoring the teaching of departmental staff
Induction of new staff
Keeping departmental staff informed of whole-school matters and encouraging debate
Development of departmental staff's professional abilities

*Table 2.2: Middle leaders' managerial tasks (Wise & Bush, 1999:191-193)*

### *Middle leaders' responsibilities: the scope*

There are some concerns about the HoDs' scope of tasks, and these can be divided into two categories; additional roles and additional responsibilities. Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989:104) found that most of the middle leaders 'were also form tutors, ... pastoral heads (heads of house or heads of year) or had school-wide responsibilities (e.g. examination entries or staff development)'. Over a decade on, Wise & Bennett (2003) report that over half of their respondent HoDs (51.3%) 'claimed to have additional responsibilities over and above those expected as part of the role for which they were answering' (p.17). In New Zealand, in addition to HoDs' departmental responsibilities, Fitzgerald (2009) mentions that their 'administrative function ... has the potential to shift their focus beyond their colleagues and department' (p.56). A middle leader

in Beirut complains about the 'gross amount of tasks ... getting tremendously more and more' (Ghamrawi, 2010:307).

Complaints of this sort serve to confirm concerns about work delegation. Speaking in the context of distributed leadership, Hartley (2010), among others, expresses scepticism about the rhetoric of staff empowerment, and chooses to link it to pragmatic attempts to 'ease the burden of over-worked headteachers' (p.271). In the US, Weller (2001) found that, of the 200 HoDs, 20% (n=40) complained about 'a significant increase' in their responsibilities beyond the scope specified in their job description (p.78).

Despite this, Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) findings illustrate that, in order for the HoDs to achieve promotion, 'there was a need to widen experiences and gain new skills' (p.104). Wise & Bennett (2003) report that 'the first, and often considered the most legitimate, source of knowledge is experience' (p.19), as 40.9% of the HoDs reported teaching experiences of 25.1-30.0 and 20.1-15.0 years respectively, confirming the remark of a principal in Metcalfe & Russell's (1997) enquiry that 'traditionally people became heads of departments because they were good teachers rather than managers' (page unspecified).

#### *Middle leaders' responsibilities: the priorities*

Task priority may be a survival strategy for many HoDs to create sufficient space for the (successful) completion of their tasks. The middle leaders in Wise & Bush's (1999) enquiry were asked to rank 12 tasks. Table 2.3 shows the top four priorities.



<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Average priority<sup>3</sup></b>
Teaching subject throughout the school	2.56
Developing the curriculum including teaching and learning strategies	3.47
Implementing school policy	5.40
Supervising/monitoring colleagues' work to ensure that policies are followed through	5.42

*Table 2.3: HoDs' partial priority tasks list*

As the table shows, the first two tasks are directly related to teaching. Wise & Bush (1999) link the perceived importance of 'implementing school policy' to 'an era of heightened external and internal accountability' (p.190). The HoDs' choice for giving a higher grade to 'supervising/monitoring colleagues' work' is interpreted by the authors as 'a major change' (Ibid), compared to the time when, if given sufficient time, 'many department heads would not use this for classroom observations, or to improve the overall performance of the team' (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989:106).

Despite these declared priorities, findings elsewhere report that 'managerial' responsibilities receive considerable attention. For example, Jarvis's (2008) respondent teachers remarked that their HoDs spent most of their time on 'administrative and managerial [tasks] ... such as examination entries and ... the obtaining of resources' (p.28). Similarly, Mercer & Ri's (2006) findings in China show that 'management' continues to play an important role.

A time span of two decades provides a useful opportunity to compare views of middle leadership at two distinct points of

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<sup>3</sup> A low mean score indicates a high priority (Wise & Bush, 1999:190).

time. One of these points relates to Ofsted (1996). In it, a 'middle manager' is accused of taking 'the narrow view that their responsibility is for managing resources rather than people' (article 148:43). This concern is reflected in an English senior leader's comment in Metcalfe & Russell's (1997) enquiry when s/he describes people management as 'a real problem', mainly because the HoDs in charge 'won't deal with it themselves' (page unspecified). Twenty years later, Ofsted (2015) continues to hold the middle leaders accountable for differential performance by expressing discontent over their 'insufficient rigour in monitoring teaching and standards in their areas of responsibility' (Article 135:79). Although the Report does not specifically refer to the HoDs' task priority, as it did in the mid-1990s, this recent concern could be linked, though cautiously, to the middle leaders' over-involvement in managerial duties.

*Middle leaders' responsibilities: perspectives of senior leaders and HoDs*

Bennett et al's (2007) systematic empirical review of English-language studies on middle leadership between 1988 and 2005 points to two main issues, namely whole-school focus vs. departmental loyalty and line management vs. collegiality.

This statement consists of two paradoxical pairs; departmental loyalty vs. whole-school focus and line management vs. collegiality. The first oxymoron is discussed below.

The tendency of the HoDs to ally themselves with their departmental members tends to implicate the HoDs' relationships with their school-based role sets, senior leaders and teachers. Brown & Rutherford (1998:86) in England

identified several shortages to 'improving the quality of education and to raising standards'; lack of time, curriculum stability, professional development opportunities, vision and communication. With regard to the final point, communication, the authors report that they identified 'lack of communication between [some HoDs] and their senior management teams' (Ibid). The nature of 'communication', as evident in this following remark, implies 'dialogue', rather than means of communication; 'A reluctance of heads of department to be involved in whole-school issues was certainly one cause of friction' (Ibid). In other words, the HoDs took deliberate action to avoid leadership involvement at the school level, not least because, according to Brown & Rutherford (1998:86-87), 'empowerment by the senior management team was sometimes regarded as being "dumped upon" by the head of department'.

Lack of time, identified by Brown & Rutherford (1998) above, plays a crucial, and negative, role. Glover et al (1998) remark that shortage of time 'push[es] the middle managers to do what has to be done' (p.288), leading to overemphasis on managerial tasks. In the same enquiry, they report some senior leaders' disapproval of this, and they accuse their HoDs of 'spending time in administration as a refuge rather than become involved in newer roles in evaluation and staff development' (Ibid). This remark, however, contrasts with Weller's (2001) observations of role perceptions among 200 HoDs in the US, where 85% (n=75) of the respondents demanded more involvement in 'improving classroom instruction and curriculum, planning staff development, making schoolwide decisions, supervising

instruction, making departmental decisions ... and hiring and firing faculty' (p.78).

The following section discusses middle leaders' role relationships.

### Role relationships

Glover et al (1998:287) announce that the role of a middle leader is 'fraught with difficulty'. In the new century, Wise (2001) reaches a similar conclusion, and finds that 'middle managers have to contend with conflicting views of their role from their senior managers and team members' (p.340). This situation is evident in the unpleasant experience of a female HoD in Busher's (2005:144) study in England, where she perceived that 'the hardest part of her job was to persuade her colleagues to follow the same policy and practice, particularly as the department was made up of "quite diverse people"'.

Bennett et al (2007:462) posit that 'tensions abound in the nature and expectations of middle leadership'. Furthermore, they identified 'three sets of key issues that ran through the research findings' (p.456), and these are, with minor changes, introduced as follows:

- Collegiality vs. line management
- Professionalism vs. accountability
- Authority vs. expertise

Tam (2010) relates the successful experience of a Chinese HoD, Michael, who managed to 'overcome the difficulties' in the process of school-based curriculum development (SBCD) in a Hong Kong secondary school (p.367). The author describes

Michael as a leader who 'aimed at developing good communication and creating a harmonious working relationship with colleagues' (p.378). He was a good listener and embraced different opinions.

These remarks echo Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989:106) finding in England that 'the more effective department heads were able to foster a collegial climate'. Conversely, the English HoDs in Glover et al's (1998) study expressed concern about their decision-making power, and highlighted the paradoxical relationship between collegiality and line management:

Although the consultative approach is important and we are said to be contributing, at the level of real decision-making, it rests with the head or a very small group. (P.283)

The strong belief that school is community and person oriented cannot exist easily alongside a systems approach, and ideas such as line management interfere with this philosophy which staff know they can get round by talking to the right people on the senior staff. (Ibid)

Speaking in the context of instructional monitoring, Wise (2001:337) remarks that line management is practised variously 'within and between schools', suggesting a continuum, on one end of which there is the "there if need be" HoD, and on the other, there is a strict HoD with 'regular timetabled meetings with a specific member of the senior management' (Ibid).

One aspect of professionalism is professional autonomy which means that 'considerable freedom has traditionally been given to those who are experts in their own particular field' (Metcalf & Russell, 1997: page unspecified), e.g. teachers and HoDs. This

perceived 'freedom' contrasts with notions of instructional supervision. An HoD expresses her/his reservation thus; 'The thought that I would be going in there as an expert in some way, to sit and watch them doing it – I couldn't do it from that standpoint' (Ibid).

Similarly, some middle leaders in Glover et al (1998:289) are worried to "get [themselves] into a situation where [they] appear to be judging the work of a colleague whom [they] know to be ... a superb teacher of her subject". These observations indicate that, in such a climate, any attempts to enter a classroom with a view to judging the work of another colleague can potentially damage professional relationships. These situations recall Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989:111) advice that 'there needs to be the right balance between autonomy and control'.

The HoDs 'middle-ness' situates them within a sphere of role sets of senior leaders and teachers, among others. This situation increases the HoDs' human interactions; 'Negotiating and interacting with colleagues lay at the core of middle leaders' work with staff' (Busher, 2005:144). Hence, it is useful to examine an early study of middle leadership by Lambert (1975) in England, which intended to gain insights into the level of agreement between the headteachers and the HoDs with regard to the role functions of the latter cohort. A response rate of 80% was achieved, the outcome of which was the following typology.

<b>Area</b>	<b>HoDs</b>	<b>Heads</b>	<b>Index of Agreement</b>
<b>Instrumental academic</b>	85%	92%	0.93
<b>Instrumental institutional</b>	66%	80%	0.82
<b>Expressive institutional</b>	50%	62%	0.81
<b>Expressive academic</b>	66.7%	89%	0.75

*Table 2.4: Lambert's typology of department heads' role functions*

As the table illustrates, only in the 'instrumental-academic' is there the highest measure of agreement between the headteachers and the HoDs. Despite this optimistic view, the two quartiles that attract the lowest percentage agreement are those that contain 'expressive'. Lambert's own words in this regard are worthy of attention; '... the expressive academic area would seem to be the area which was likely to be the source of possible role-conflict' (1975:37). This area reflects the necessity of human intervention in the form of interpretation and judgement, a purely subjective zone, a fertile ground for the growth of micropolitics, 'balkanised culture' (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992:71), and conflict. To minimise tensions, two strategies are proposed; effective induction and clear job descriptions.

### *Induction*

Bush (2008:65) defines induction as 'the process by which new incumbents become familiar with the context in which they are leading, including the school culture'. Ofsted (1996) in England states that 'most secondary schools have effective induction programmes for new teachers and newly qualified teachers' (Article 154:44). Glover et al (1998:287) regard induction 'to be the task of the subject leader', although they identified 'mentoring arrangements' in place in one school for the new staff to 'settle in' (Ibid). Relying on mentoring, or 'continuous professional development', as an extension to initial induction, is

highlighted by Ofsted (2015) as a strategy to prevent 'good progress in training' from dissipating (Article 150:82). Thorpe & Bennett-Powell (2014) in the UK report their interviewees demanding 'more formal induction programmes for new heads of department' (p.55).

Induction of new staff is a managerial task (Wise & Bush, 1999) (see table 2.2 above). In England, Wise & Bennett's (2003) study of managerial tasks expectations yielded the following results.

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>HoDs</b>	<b>Heads</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Keeping staff ... informed of whole school matters	88.1	93.2	5.1
Monitoring the teaching of staff	84.8	91.6	6.8
Inducting new staff	83.7	95.0	11.3
Development of professional abilities	82.1	93.1	11.0
Providing support for colleagues facing disciplinary problems	73.7	87.7	14.0

*Table 2.5: Senior and middle leaders' perceptions of managerial tasks  
(Wise & Bennett, 2003:31)*

As the data indicate, the greatest differences are related to the last three tasks, including induction of new staff, where more of the senior leaders than the HoDs expect the latter to assume more responsibility for familiarising the staff with the 'context' and 'culture' (Bush, 2008) of their new environment.

### *Job descriptions*

Differential perceptions about the middle leadership role serve to justify Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) advice about the importance of job descriptions, as they provide 'detailed specifications so that individuals know what is expected of them and what they can expect from others' (p.107). Weller (2001) explores this issue, and poses this question; 'Have you ever seen



a copy of your job description, and, if so, are your current duties similar or dissimilar to those in your job description?’ (p.77). According to the author, of the 77% of the HoDs who had “seen” their job descriptions, 40% reported role expansion outside the scope stipulated, whereas 38% reported mismatch between statements and expectations. This piece of evidence suggests that a job description is not sufficient to influence performance. The manner in which it is used and regarded can either highlight or undermine its effectiveness. Brown & Rutherford (1998) provide some evidence that shows how an effective use of job descriptions in England helped to bring about stability and coherence to the departments concerned. The authors learned that ‘a comprehensive handbook was seen as a key document which brought order and consistency to the work of the department’ (p.87). They attribute this to external inspections, which are carried out by Ofsted in England and Wales.

Harris et al’s (1995) enquiry into “effective” departments shows the importance of the presence of ‘detailed and agreed schemes of work [SoWs] that had been collectively approved’ (p.288). In addition to consistency of the SoWs with the ‘general vision of the subject in the department’, they were ‘very detailed, with clear guidance; they were regarded as important documents, and they were easily accessible ... agreed by all the department after a discussion’ (pp.288-289). In a related study, Harris (1998) found that, in ‘ineffective’ departments, the departmental handbook ‘was often out of date [and] inadequate’ (p.272), and was ‘poorly put together, as a result of rushing to meet Ofsted requirements’ (p.272). These indications serve to suggest that, while departmental documentation is very

important, the manner in which it is used plays a more crucial role.

### Instructional engagement

HoDs are part-teachers, with the classroom as the centre of their instructional activities, and part-leaders, with responsibilities beyond the domain of the classroom. When 'outside' the classroom, the HoDs remain connected with the classroom through the following means:

- Monitoring
- Modelling
- Professional dialogue and discussion
- Professional growth

The first three strategies were suggested by Southworth (2002), whereas the final strategy has been introduced by Blasé & Blasé (2002). These strategies are usually discussed in connection with instructional leadership. Two well-established researchers of IL are Hallinger & Murphy (1985), who proposed the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), which consists of three overarching themes with 10 components, two of which are shared with Southworth (2002) and Blasé & Blasé (2002); supervising/evaluating monitoring and professional development. One of the criticisms of instructional leadership concerns its over-emphasis on heads at the expense of excluding other staff (Bush, 2014b). However, Ghamrawi's (2010) enquiry in Lebanon, among other studies (e.g. Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Weller, 2001; Wise & Bennett, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2009), bears testimony to the 'idea that subject leaders are taking over tasks that have been previously attributed to senior leaders' (p.307). Thus, HoDs are increasingly

expected to play an active role in ensuring instructional quality. The following discussion examines several pertinent themes to the middle leaders' instructional activities.

### *Monitoring*

Monitoring is a managerial responsibility (Wise & Bush, 1999; see table 2.2 above), and an important component of instructional leadership. There are two types of monitoring; formal and informal. Glover et al (1998) state that, of seven schools in England, 'formal monitoring and evaluation of classroom work is evident in four of the schools' (p.287). Formal monitoring is commonly linked to appraisal, and entails performance judgements with career benefits or consequences. In Turner's (2000) enquiry in Wales, there were divergent views about the usefulness of formal monitoring for professional development (p.311). For example, while a maths HoD believed that formal monitoring provided the opportunity for 'giving less experienced departmental staff ideas about handling less able, unmotivated pupils', there were 'experienced teachers not being willing to accept constructive criticism from their HoD' (p.311). In cases of formal observations, a mechanism is perceived to be in place, which occurs 'very regularly ... on an appointment basis, [and] mutually agreed' (p.311).

Despite this, formal monitoring has been criticised for undermining passion and innovation (Metcalf & Russell, 1997). Wise (2001) found that, for a researched HoD in England, (formal) monitoring 'definitely would be a priority if it wasn't seen as a threat' (p.338), adding that there are 'people in the department who are quite nervous of being observed' (Ibid).

However, Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989) recognise the usefulness of what they mention as 'formal evaluation and review' (p.110), as it aids the SMT to become 'more aware of the lot of the teacher, and ... break down isolation and encourage a dialogue between the various parties' (Ibid).

In cases where formal monitoring is not possible or desired, HoDs rely on informal monitoring, which, in Glover et al's (1998) view, 'lacks precision and inhibits systematic use' (p.289). Drawing on Ofsted (1997) reports, and while acknowledging the shortcomings of informal observation, Wise (2001) believes that 'informal monitoring must be supplemented with more formal procedures' (p.338). However, Metcalfe & Russell (1997: page unspecified) question the differential readiness of departments to introduce more formal approaches to monitoring and evaluation', a view which can be extended to other schools.

There is also considerable evidence that this managerial function is not carried out effectively. In the mid-1990s, Ofsted (1996) expresses serious concern that quality control 'continues to be the weakest aspects of management but there are indications of improvement' (Article 144:42). Some two decades on, despite softer language, the concerns persist (2015).

Several reasons have been suggested for this. Drawing on Bennett's (1995:75) finding that, instead of direct classroom observation, the HoDs prefer to check exercise books, for example, Wise (2001) concludes that while 'the [HoDs] are aware that they should be monitoring, ... [they] are unwilling or unable to do so directly' (p.334), fearing the negative impact of monitoring on relationships. Bullock (1988:66) found that, to the

HoDs, monitoring 'the progress of students taught by a colleague was thought to be an embarrassing activity'. A year later, Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989) reported that, as a result of monitoring, 'it was felt that relationships with colleagues would somehow suffer if the management role were fully embraced' (p.106). In Hannay & Denby's (1994) study in Canada, an HoD describes it as 'risky to help others; [and] set yourself up as I'm better than you' (p.19), and in England, 'many interviewees ... would be seen as "spies" out to find fault or expose weakness' (Metcalf & Russell, 1997: page unspecified). In Lebanon, Ghamrawi (2010) reports similar concerns.

Another reason for HoDs' lack of monitoring concerns its paradoxical link with collegiality. Bennett et al (2007) describe this paradox as 'the difference between conceptualising the role as a hierarchically based quality assurance process and seeing it as a collegial process of mutual learning' (p.462).

Despite these indications, there is some evidence of change in attitude. In Table 2.3 above, Wise & Bush (1999) place 'supervising/monitoring colleagues' work' fourth, and conclude that this is 'a major change from the pre-ERA (Education Reform Act) period' (p.190; also see Wise, 2001). This change in attitude has been linked to 'external pressure' (Wise & Bush, 1999:192), by Ofsted in the UK, for example, and 'accountability for the performance of the subject department' (Adey, 2000:426). However, Wise (2001) cautions that 'this does not mean that it actually happens' (p.340). For example, in the USA, nearly '88 percent of the department heads stated they were not responsible for teacher evaluations' (Weller, 2001:79). Of the

remaining 12% who did undertake evaluations, only 4% said that 'they had the primary responsibility for teacher evaluation' (Ibid). In the mid-2010s, Thorpe & Bennett-Powell (2014) mentioned high levels of confidence for several aspects of their role, however, they did not feel equally confident in 'monitoring and holding their teams to account' (Ibid). This account serves to demonstrate that attitudinal changes about monitoring are contextually grounded, and generalisations can lead to false assumptions.

However, the most important barrier to HoD's monitoring practice is shortage of time. In England, Brown & Rutherford (1998) found that 'all [n=8] of the [HoDs]' mentioned 'lack of time' as an 'obstacle to improving the quality of education and to raising standards' (p.86), suggesting 'little' change since the time of Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) mention of this matter, and reflected in Wise & Bush's (1999:194) study that shows that HoDs 'have almost the same teaching load as classroom teachers', barely exceeding 'one period' of management time in one school and 'two periods' in the remaining two (Ibid). The issue of time shortage seems so important that Adey & Jones (1997) have allocated a section to it - 'Lack of time' (p.135), in which they introduce time constraint as an 'obstacle to effective performance of the PDC [professional development coordinator]'. Wise & Bennett (2003:3) studied middle leadership, exercised by various groups of practitioners, indicating the mean amount of time for all to be '3.31 hours per week' (p.7), which is only slightly more than what Wise & Bush (1999) report for their middle managers. Busher's (2005) observations in England show that 'a

considerable amount' of the middle leaders' non-contact time is spent 'dealing with students who flouted school rules and contacting and relating to parents because of this' (p.145).

Gurr & Drysdale's (2012) reflections on three doctoral studies in Australia (e.g. Keane, 2010), highlight the importance of creating time for middle leaders. This is one of Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) recommendations, which was made some 20 years before, and as evident in the discussions above, has been ignored, not only in the West, but also in the East. In China, for example, Mercer & Ri (2006) report that 'HoDs rarely visited their teachers' classrooms' (p.113). In England, Wise (2001) accuses the heads of 'not giving the middle managers the time to do it [monitoring]' (p.339). The difficulties discussed herein testify to Bush's observation that monitoring is 'the most controversial' aspect of middle leaders' roles and responsibilities (Bush, 2003a:4).

#### *Modelling & professional dialogue and discussion*

Drawing on Southworth's (2002:84) participants' views in England, modelling can be understood as a mechanism by which

Heads used their teaching as an example of what and how to do things, worked alongside staff in their classrooms, [and] coaching staff.

Southworth (2002) discusses modelling in the context of instructional leadership, hence its focus on principals. However, due to a mounting workload, the focus has been seeing a shift towards middle leaders. Accordingly, modelling can be carried out by an HoD for her/his department members; similarly, it can

be conducted by teachers for teachers, which is commonly referred to as peer observation.

The former approach suggests that teachers visit their HoDs' classrooms as a means of professional development. This practice is contingent upon the idea that teachers view their HoDs as having 'credibility ... as they take on multiple roles as coach, supervisor and mentor to both beginner and experienced teachers' (Heng & Marsh, 2009:529). In her study into 'ineffective' departments, Harris (1998) describes a perceived unsuccessful HoD as one who 'in most cases was not someone who was respected by those within the department as an *expert practitioner*. In fact, there was frequent criticism of the teaching approaches employed by the [HoD]' (p.273, original emphasis).

Modelling can also be undertaken by teachers for teachers. In England, Wise (2001) identified statements in two departments' handbooks which 'encouraged peer observation on a regular basis' (p.338). Peer observation in Singapore is taken seriously and appears to be systematic. According to Heng & Marsh (2009), the Ministry of Education (MoE) has 'one-hour scheduled time during the school week for teachers to undertake professional sharing' (p.531). Peer observation is also reported in Lebanon (Ghamrawi, 2010:315) as a mechanism that 'builds leadership capacity in teachers of ... department by strengthening the professional dialogue among members'.

Despite these perceived practices and benefits of peer observation, there are some concerns. For example, despite written indications of peer observation, Wise (2001) found that 'in practice it did not happen' (p.338). Ghamrawi (2010) remarks



that peer observation can be a 'double-edged sword', leading to difficulties for a teacher participant where s/he noticed that 'some teachers got sensitive due to the remarks of their colleagues', leading to the termination of the initiative (p.315). A department's inability, unwillingness or abandonment of exercising peer observation has been identified by Harris (1998) as a feature of ineffective departments.

Positive attitudes towards modelling, or suspicious feelings about it, can have constructive or harmful effects on professional dialogue and discussion. Speaking in the context of principals' instructional leadership role, Southworth (2002) explains that, in his study, professional dialogue and discussion occurred as a result of follow-up 'visits to classrooms with informal discussions with individuals, or used questions to probe teachers' assumptions and to promote ideas and ways forward' (p.84). These activities can be extended to middle leaders, provided there exists a conducive professional climate. One pleasant experience of successful departmental collaboration is related by a teacher in Ghamrawi's (2010) enquiry in Lebanon where s/he describes their middle leader's success 'in bringing us [the teachers] to the point where we all share him in evaluating a classroom that he observes ... benefiting from the remarks and comments provided by colleagues' (p.315). In England, Harris et al (1995) mention 11 points for effective departments, the first of which reads: 'a collegiate management style' (p.297), the importance of which is reflected in the anecdotes above.

### *Professional growth*

Professional growth is a managerial responsibility (Wise & Bush, 1999), which involves the 'development of departmental staff's professional abilities' (p.192; see table 2.2). Blasé & Blasé's (2002) understanding of professional growth has considerable overlaps with the notion of modelling. They speak of the importance of 'providing staff development opportunities' by 'encouraging teachers to visit other teachers', and 'to become peer coaches and models for each other' (pp.259-260). In Singapore, teachers 'are given 100 hours of professional development opportunities per year' (Heng & Marsh, 2009:530), which is centrally organised by the MoE, and serves to fulfil Blasé & Blasé's (2002) remark. However, circumstances for school-based programmes point to different experiences, as none of the respondents in Weller's (2001) study in the US admitted that they had any responsibility for staff development. However, '60 percent' of them said they "'made suggestions" to their principals concerning staff development topics' (p.78). Moreover, '70 percent' said that they did not conduct any professional development training, mainly due to 'a lack of time, incentive and resources' (Ibid:79). Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989) suggest that heads and deputies 'provide cover' for the HoDs to create the time and space for the effective implementation of these roles and responsibilities (p.110), which can include solutions such as 'increasing staffing [to] the setting of a permanent pool of supply teachers' (p.109).

Similarly, in England, Brown & Rutherford (1998) have identified several issues affecting middle leadership practice, including 'the lack of opportunities for professional development at the

departmental level' (p.86). They add; 'Inset days, we were repeatedly told and with a degree of frustration and resentment, were mainly used for whole-school issues' (Ibid). In Wales, Turner (2000) has also found that 'the agenda for the five training days in the school year was dominated by whole-school issues' (p.310). However, he reports more positive views about 'school-based INSET' than Weller (2001) in the US; 'These kinds of activities were widely acclaimed by 26 (72%) of the HoDs to be very helpful in the professional development of colleagues' (Turner, 2000:310).

These reflections serve to justify the average rank of staff professional development among the HoDs in Wise & Bush's (1999) study in England. Out of the 12 tasks, the HoDs accorded rank 8 to 'devising and leading INSET with your departmental staff', with the average priority grade of 7.13 (p.190). This choice places staff development responsibility four ranks below monitoring (rank 4, grade 5.42; see table 2.3), both being important components of instructional leadership.

In cases where staff development does take place, however, these are, according to '20 percent' of the HoDs in Weller's (2001) study in the US, commonly focused on 'student discipline, disrespectful parents, student search and seizure policies, and conflict management' (p.79). These programmes are conducted via 'hour-long "seminars" to full-day workshops' (Ibid). The topics for 'half-day or full-day' programmes discuss 'improving student test-taking skills, reading in the content area and curriculum alignment' (Ibid). In Wales, the INSET topics were directed to 'detailed discussion of the schemes of work ... dealing

with the under-achievement of boys, discussing suitable teaching strategies when working with less able pupils ... and help with the management of classroom behaviour' (Turner, 2000:310). The observations in this section reinforce this matter that professional growth, alongside monitoring and modelling, as important aspects of instructional leadership, is practised variously within and across schools.

### Leadership involvement

Leadership at all levels, especially at the level of middle leaders, has been emphasised by Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989:102) to be 'the driving force behind any school ... and key to improving the quality of the learning process'. However, there are concerns about the leadership role of HoDs. A comparison of the titles used in Ofsted reports for the HoDs shows that, in the mid-1990s, the HoDs were referred to as 'middle managers' (Ofsted, 1996:43), whereas in the mid-2010s, this has been changed to 'middle leadership' (Ofsted, 2015:78) to stress a broader leading responsibility. However, research in the West (e.g. Jarvis, 2008 in England) and in the East (e.g. Mercer & Ri, 2006 in China) indicates that management continues to dominate HoDs' job scope. Similarly, an Australian study (Keane, 2010), reflected upon by Gurr & Drysdale (2012), stresses that 'the administrative aspect was important', however, the senior leaders believed that these HoDs should 'exert more leadership' (p.61).

In England, Jarvis (2008) found that the researched HoDs exhibited 'a reluctance ... to be seen as leaders' (p.27). There are several reasons for this attitude. Recalling Wise & Bush's

(1999) enquiry into middle leaders' tasks priority (see table 2.3 above), the respondent HoDs consider 'teaching' to be the top priority. This level of attention to teaching and classroom activities indicates that almost all HoDs begin their career in the classroom. This could explain the HoDs' unwillingness to observe their teachers' lessons, as this may have an adverse effect on their professional relationships (e.g. Bullock, 1988; Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Hannay & Denby, 1994; Metcalfe & Russell, 1997; Glover et al, 1998; Ghamrawi, 2010). It also serves to explain why 'more than 90 percent' of the HoDs in Weller's (2001) US study mentioned "people skills" an essential quality for successful middle leadership. In England, Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989) identified that 'the ability to manage people' was 'of paramount importance' (p.108), and, in Australia, the HoDs in a doctoral study (Keane, 2010), reflected on by Gurr & Drysdale (2012), 'expressed frustration about difficult staff members or problems getting staff together' (p.61). These observations point to the following issues:

- Leadership succession
- Leadership training
- Leadership enactment

### *Leadership succession*

Turner (2000) explains that HoDs are appointed based on 'proven classroom competence and the acquisition of sufficient experience of teaching' (p.301). Discussions pertinent to leadership succession point to two mechanisms; internal promotion and external recruitment, both of which have a close connection with staff turnover. From the viewpoint of a senior leader, Rhodes & Brundrett (2009) explain that, while a high

staff turnover could cause 'the difficulty in planning for succession', others thought that this 'may provide opportunities for internal leadership succession in addition to external recruitment' (p.388). Some of the primary school senior leaders chose to link succession to size, where 'small school size was beneficial in succession planning as staff are required to work in teams and take on a greater diversity of roles than would be expected in a larger school' (Ibid). From the perspectives of the middle leaders and teachers, there was little awareness about 'succession planning ... within their own schools' (Ibid). While some saw the principal's support important for 'achieving leadership promotion', they considered 'staffing stability' as a possible hindrance (Ibid). Contrary to this latter remark, turnover at a school in New Zealand facilitated the appointment of a new HoD when the previous one left (Fitzgerald, 2009).

Harris et al (1995) gaze upon low staff turnover as 'an important feature' of successful departments and schools (p.290). However, the same feature, low staff turnover, is seen as a disadvantage in ineffective departments as this means that 'the external stimulus for change provided by a new member of staff was not a possibility' (p.273). This 'external' aspect of the latter comment has resonated well with 'some heads [who] argued that an external appointment was always desirable to offer new thinking' (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009:387-388).

Another succession type operates on the basis of 'job rotation' (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009:384), or 'cyclical subject leadership', which, according to a participant in Ghamrawi's (2010) study in

Lebanon, means that 'this year I am the coordinator, [and] the next year my colleague is the coordinator ... and so forth (p.313). Despite variations in appointments and recruitments, these observations suggest a general lack of consistency in middle leaders' succession plans.

### *Leadership training*

There is a perceived absence of training, prior to appointment or recruitment, as much of HoDs' leadership learning occurs in subsequent stages of employment. For example, Rosenfeld et al (2009) in Australia report that 'all HoDs described learning about leadership on the job' (p.9). In England, Adey (2000) reports that '112 respondents (57.4%) indicated that they had received no training ... before taking on the role', with another '23 (11.8%)' leaving this question unanswered (p.422). One HoD in this research, among others, describes her/his leadership experience as very useful, not least because this allowed her/him to 'learn from colleagues' (p.423).

These comments serve to validate Wise & Bennett's (2003) remark about the priority of experience, as the notion of leadership 'learning on the job' essentially relies on past experiences. Several weaknesses with this 'type' of leadership learning have been identified. Drawing on remarks by Eraut (1994), and echoing Bush (2003b) above, Turner (2000) concludes that 'over-reliance on past experience could lead to uncritical acceptance of observable behaviour' (p.302).

Nevertheless, leadership 'learning on the job' does take place, and is subject to variations, which largely depends on one's 'luck' (Turner, 2000). In this study, twenty HoDs (56%) expressed

satisfaction with their previous HoDs, and one HoD considers herself/himself as 'extremely fortunate to work under HoDs who have been kindly, supportive, very professional and democratic' (p.305). Conversely, 17 HoDs (47%) related disappointing stories about working with their previous HoDs, as they were found to be 'very distant and have very little to do with you' (p.306).

Middle leadership inconsistencies may have been a main reason for according leadership training a top priority (e.g. Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989). Since then, several formal leadership training programmes for middle leaders have been introduced. In England, the National College for School Leadership<sup>4</sup> (NCSL) was 'established in 2000' and was 'the main provider of professional programmes for school leaders' (Bush, 2012a:663). In 2003, NCSL launched a programme, 'Leading from the Middle (LftM)' (Naylor et al, 2006), with a view to 'improving leadership at middle levels in schools' (p.11). LftM was subsequently replaced by the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership, which pursues the fulfilment of outcomes such as 'changes in leadership practices, changes that affect school outcomes and changes in teaching and learning processes and in pupil outcomes' (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014:52). Such formal training programmes could be a response to concerns expressed by Harris et al (2000:26), for example, that 'only a limited number of these [training programmes] focus upon preparing subject leaders to be more effective in their role', a remark that is confirmed by three HoDs in Turner's (2000)

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<sup>4</sup> In April 2013, the NCSL merged with the Teacher Training Agency to become the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). (Ofsted, 2015:15)



enquiry. These remarks echo Wise & Bennett's (2003) recommendation for the provision of 'more bespoke training programmes' for middle leaders.

### *Leadership enactment*

The manner in which HoDs choose to lead their departments is the subject of this section. Howson & Woolnough (1982) created and tested two leadership models in 11 comprehensive schools in England. Conceiving these on a continuum, there are "democratic" and "control" models. The 'democratic' leadership suggests that HoDs 'should not only consult but also involve other members of the department in the decision-making' (p.41). They provide a positive conception of the 'control' leadership style, and define it as an expectation for 'giving a lead on matters of policy ... shaping the direction in which the department should move' (Ibid). The results of the survey indicate that the respondent HoDs prefer the 'democratic' style. However, responses such as 'lead, manage and organise rather than persuade, inspire or motivate' to a question about an HoD's job description have prompted the authors to treat the results with care, as these suggest a distinction between reality and perceptions. They even cast doubt on the respondents' conception of 'democratic' style for what they assume to be 'a *laissez-faire* style of leadership where individuals are allowed to teach as they would like without the benefits of features like a common curriculum and close support and cooperation within the department' (p.43). These findings indicate how conceptions of very ordinary terms such as 'democratic' may be twisted to suit the circumstances of the individuals concerned.

In her study of 'ineffective' departments, Harris (1998) identified two broad categories of departmental leadership; laissez faire and authoritarian. A laissez faire HoD is characterised by shirking the responsibility 'to take the department forward or to lead from the front' (p.271), resulting in 'a clear absence of ... direction [and] internal cohesion ... leading to permanent divisions within the department' (Ibid). An authoritarian HoD, however, is described as 'over-controlling, over-anxious and ... reluctant to delegate tasks or responsibilities' (p.271). Thus, the HoD led as individually as the teachers who taught in isolation, creating a point for both laissez faire and authoritarian styles to meet. The two studies, presented here, provide a polarised view of leadership over a span of 16 years, and serve to stress the need for training for middle leaders, not only in the realm of leadership, but also roles, responsibilities, role relationships and instructional commitments.

### **Middle Leadership in Malaysia**

This author was able to identify only two complementary studies in Malaysia. The first, an unpublished MA dissertation, explores middle leadership in an international secondary school (Javadi, 2014), with themes similar to those in this thesis:

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- Role relationships
- Instructional engagement
- Leadership involvement

The following section discusses these themes.

### Roles and responsibilities

Javadi (2014) presents eight roles and responsibilities of the HoDs, called 'coordinators' at Dandelion International School (a pseudonym), pointing to teaching as the first role of the HoDs, followed by their middle leadership role. However, according to Javadi, the middle leaders hold diverse roles, such as 'a class tutor, key stage leader, year group leader, IGCSE speaking examiner, and internal exam officer' (p.38). Despite this, managerial responsibilities dominate, ranging from preparing schemes of work to managing worksheets, among others. Although the final responsibility (#8) is not a duty, it is an expectation that leaves the role boundary open to interpretation; 'Subject coordinators are also required to undertake other duties from time to time as the school requires' (p.36). The scope and nature of these duties are unknown, and may lead to role confusion, overlap and possible friction.

### Role relationships

Javadi (2014) discusses the troubled relationships between the middle managers and the SMT, where most criticisms are directed at lack of autonomy. From the deputy principal's point of view, this approach is justifiable as the SMT knows what is 'best for the school, the students and the staff' (p.43).

### Instructional engagement

According to Javadi (2014), the HoDs are reluctant to conduct lesson observations. However, alternative methods are popular such as checking worksheets, chatting and discussions. Most of the middle leaders blame the SMT, attributing their inaction to lack of authority.

Also, there are complaints about shortage of time. While this is recognised by the deputy principal, however, ironically, he expresses concern, not in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, but about the HoDs' 'policing' of paperwork; 'Some of them [HoDs] may have quite a heavy workload and ... may not have enough time to go through some of the documents very thoroughly' (p.40).

#### Leadership involvement

According to Javadi (2014), the majority of the HoDs do not perceive themselves as leaders of their departments. Out of the five HoDs, however, only one middle leader speaks confidently of her/his leadership role; 'Yes, I do [see myself as a leader]. Because I feel the people with whom I work, after a year or a few months, they really show the results I'm expecting' (p.41).

This perceived leadership apathy highlights the role of training. According to Javadi (2014), none of the middle leaders had received any formal training, relying, instead, on learning on the job. The experiences of the participating HoDs suggest great consistency between international literature and this empirical evidence at an international school in southern Malaysia.

The second research, by Ghavifekr et al (2014), used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the issues and challenges of HoDs 'as transformational leaders' in five Chinese primary schools in Kuala Lumpur. Ghavifekr et al (2014:126) identify several barriers to the effective performance of the HoDs:

- Workload
- Relationships with the teachers and the parents

### HoDs' workload and relationships with the teachers and parents

There is a direct relationship between heavy workload and shortage of time, and an inverse relationship between these and teaching. Public schools in Malaysia are obliged to adhere to the guidelines of the MoE, which, may entail a considerable amount of paper work.

Broadly speaking, Ghavifekr et al (2014) claim a favourable relationship between the HoDs and the teachers. However, there are several issues that affect this relationship. 'Teachers ... always take leave, are late to school or try to shirk their responsibilities' (p.128). Due to the time-consuming nature of attitudinal shifts, the HoDs at these researched sites express their powerlessness as they 'are not given autonomy to fire the related teachers', relying, instead, on 'warnings' (pp.128-129).

Parents are important clients at private schools, including international schools, for their provision of funding in the form of fees. Ghavifekr et al (2014) mention several issues about parents, such as their lack of commitment, parental complaints and high expectations. The ethnic population overlap between this study and the one carried out by Walker (2004) in Hong Kong is illuminating as some parents tend to hold schools fully responsible for educating their children.

### HoDs and instructional engagement

The instructional practices reported by Ghavifekr et al (2014) are consistent with the international literature, most notably with the themes introduced by Blasé & Blasé (2002) and Southworth (2002). Following the lead from Southworth, the following

section discusses modelling and monitoring, as well as professional dialogue and discussion.

#### *Modelling and monitoring*

Ghavifekr et al (2014) discuss modelling, observation and peer observation as a series of connected themes. The process begins with observation, and is followed up by a peer observation opportunity arranged between a less and a more experienced teacher.

#### *Professional dialogue and discussion*

Ghavifekr et al (2014) place great emphasis on the importance of 'collective learning' (p.133), which they link to opportunities provided for sharing teaching strategies. Their findings reflect the importance the participating HoDs accord to teaching, despite the fact that external pressures are an erosion of their time.

#### *Continuing professional development (CPD)*

The CPD programmes at Ghavifekr et al's (2014) researched sites are twofold; in-house and overseas. The in-house training consists of programmes that are organised on the premises of the schools. The overseas programmes are held in Singapore, Taiwan and China. To all these aspects of instructional engagement, motivational bonuses such as awards or international trips can be added.

### **Instructional Leadership**

The review of literature on instructional leadership (IL) reveals its primary focus on the principal, and thus, contrasts with the notion of middle leadership. Purinton (2013:280) argues that IL

suffers from 'structural confusion' as 'the expected aims of schools rely on teachers', and not directly on principals (Ibid: 280). Hallinger (2005) considers a major barrier to school improvement to be the attempt of some principals 'to carry the burden alone' (p.234). Bush (2014) announces the decline in popularity of IL because of 'two fundamental flaws. First, it focuses on principals/headteachers, to the exclusion of other leaders and teachers. Second, it emphasises teaching rather than learning' (p.3). Hallinger (2005), a key proponent of IL states that:

During the 1980s, relatively little reference was made to teachers, department heads, or even to assistant principals as instructional leaders. There was little discussion of instructional leadership as a distributed characteristics or function to be shared. (P.223)

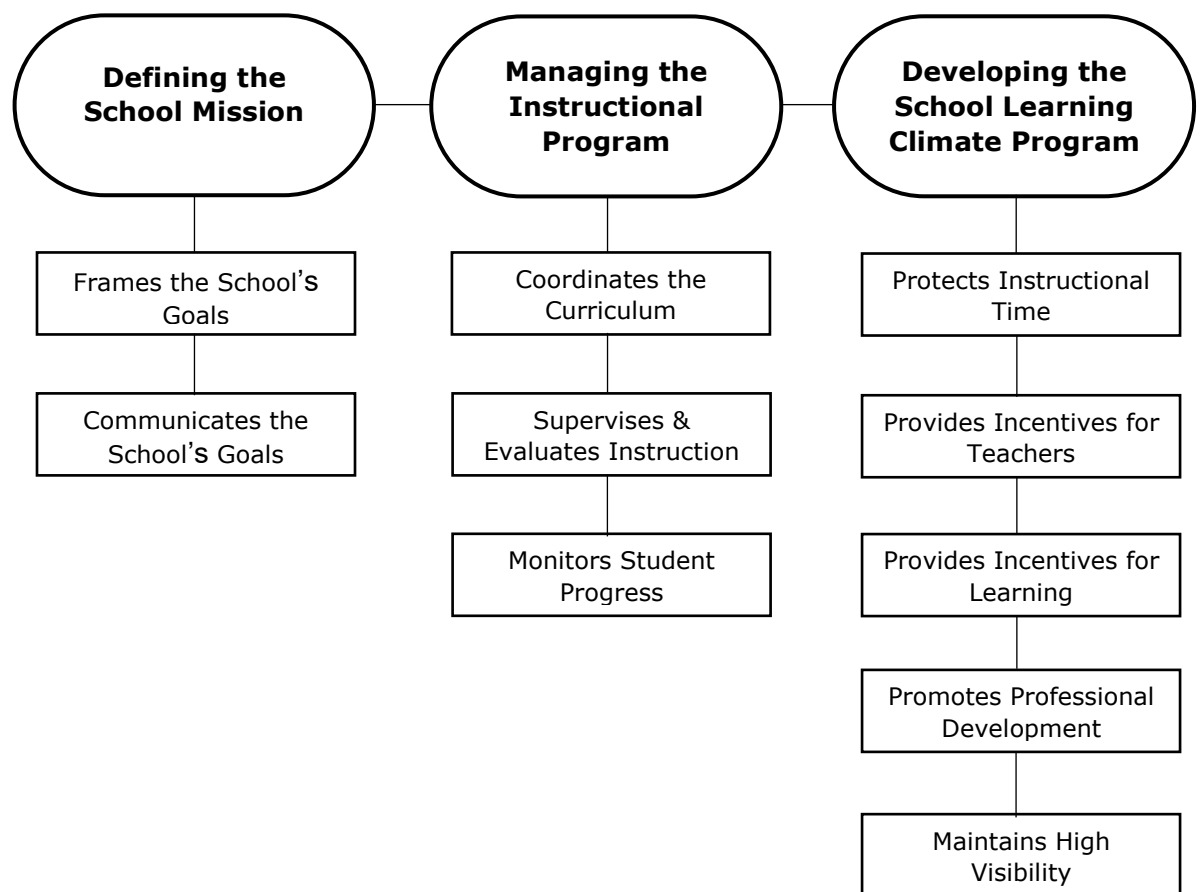
A 'distributed approach' of IL (Bush, 2014:3) is referred to as "leadership for learning" (Hallinger, 2009) (LfL), and it seeks to engage the instructional activities of middle leaders. In other words, what affords LfL its distributed aspect resides at the level of middle leaders, and by extension, teachers.

Because department heads are an extension of the administration, and because they have teaching and subject expertise, greater efforts should be made to involve them more directly in improving instruction and increasing student learning. (Weller, 2001:75)

Accordingly, it is suitably consistent with the focus of this thesis if, alongside mentions of principals, appropriate references were made to the instructional activities of the HoDs.

### Instructional leadership: principals

In the mid-2000s, Hallinger (2005:227) declares IL to be 'the most frequently studied model of school leadership' over the past quarter of a century. Work by Hallinger & Murphy (1985) has led to the development of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This is a scale which 'has been used in studies of principal leadership throughout the world since 1982' (see [philiphallinger.com/about-2/](http://philiphallinger.com/about-2/)). Figure 2.1 illustrates PIMRS dimensions.



*Figure 2.1: PIMRS dimensions*



Most of the PIMRS dimensions rely on principals. However, as Bush & Glover (2002) argue, 'leaders' influence is targeted at student learning via teachers' (p.10). This is why the influence of principals has been described as mediated or indirect (Hallinger, 2003).

In Greece, the principals' indirect involvement has been attributed to their 'limited knowledge of various subjects', as well as 'the burden of managerial tasks' upon their shoulders (Kaparou & Bush, 2015:330). There are two notions in this remark; the principals' inadequate knowledge of IL and their heavy workload. In Turkey, Gumus & Akcaoglu (2013) blame the primary school principals' outdated or limited qualifications for their lack of 'monitoring [of] the instructional activities in their schools and ... providing direct professional support to their staff' (p.298). In Lebanon, Mattar (2012) explains how the students' low social economic status (SES) forced the principals to 'expend a part of their energy, time and efforts in resolving issues that are usually taken for granted in other schools' (p.526). This circumstance confirms Hallinger's (2005:229) argument about the effect of the school context on the type of instructional leadership exercised by principals.

IL relies heavily on principals for enactment. However, as the evidence above suggests, and this grim account by Hallinger (2005) indicates, principals' instructional activities have largely failed to achieve their targets; 'By this definition, the resources devoted towards the development of principals as instructional leaders would appear to have been a failure (p.230). This perceived 'failure' may have played a part in introducing to IL a

distributed aspect, in the form of leadership for learning (LfL), which can be carried out by middle leaders.

#### Leadership for learning: middle leaders

Having discussed the 'failure' of principal-centred IL, the role of middle leaders, as 'front line' (Busher & Harris, 1999:314) subject specialists, has gained prominence. Gurr & Drysdale (2012) refer to an Australian study (White, 2000-2002), in which the curriculum area middle managers (CMM) (p.59), are mentioned as 'instructional leaders', with the capability of direct, as compared to the principals' indirect (e.g. Hallinger, 2003), involvement 'in improving the teaching and learning process' (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012:60), the aspects of which are discussed below.

#### *Monitoring*

Monitoring consists of a series of activities in which the principals engage themselves, such as examining 'teachers' weekly plans and visiting classrooms', among others (Southworth, 2002:84). This latter activity, according to Kaparou & Bush (2015), is seen as 'surveillance by teachers in Greece' (p.332), and similarly, gazed upon with suspicion in England (Metcalf & Russell, 1997) and Lebanon (Ghamrawi, 2010). However, in Hong Kong, Lai & Cheung (2013) probe 'the instructional leadership practices of school principals' following the introduction of the government's transition from 'a more centralised to a more school-based approach' (p.326). They present their findings in accordance with the 'implementation levels' of each school, and conclude that 'monitoring of teaching received most attention in high-implementation-level schools and least attention in low-

implementation-level schools' (p.339). Considering synergy associated with new initiatives, this is one example of not only successful principal leadership, but also a decentralised system, with practices that can be emulated by HoDs.

### *Modelling and peer observation*

Southworth (2002:84) found that 'modelling meant the heads used their teaching as an example of what and how to do things', which is consistent with the Blasés' (2002:258) finding when, under 'talking with teachers to promote reflection', they quote their participating teachers who view their leaders as 'effective principals [who] demonstrated teaching techniques in classrooms and during conferences'. This function corresponds to PIMRS 'managing the instructional programme' aspect. 'This dimension of instructional management involves working with teachers in areas specifically related to curriculum and instruction' (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985:222). Under this dimension, the most relevant function is 'supervising and evaluating instruction', which 'involves providing instructional support to teachers, and monitoring classroom instruction through numerous informal classroom visits' (p.222). Linked to this theme, is PIMRS's emphasis on 'monitoring student progress' whereby instructional leaders 'provide teachers with test results' as a medium for enhancing practice (p.223). As these remarks indicate, modelling encompasses several other notions, such as peer observation and feedback.

In Greece, modelling is not taken very seriously. According to Kaparou & Bush (2015), 'teachers are often unwilling to attend

sessions organised by the subject advisers<sup>5</sup>, mainly due to the teachers' mentality 'to do their job and then go home' (p.333). Similarly, school leaders are uninterested in modelling. In one example, a principal, where '99%' of her/his time was 'devoted to managerial issues', did not recognise her/his 'teaching as outstanding' to merit modelling (p.333).

While this principal relies on her/his positional power to explain her/his apathy, for middle leaders, who do not enjoy such a power base, recognition by departmental members is vital for successful modelling practice (e.g. Harris, 1998; Heng & Marsh, 2009). Furthermore, in Kaparou & Bush's (2015) study, school B's principal's priority for her/his managerial responsibilities is reminiscent of Hallinger & Lee's (2014) description of principals in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia, for whom their 'traditional identity' is shaped by their civil servant status (p.11).

Almost all the principals, whose schools have been involved in the Hong Kong government's school-based management initiative, lent their support to the implementation of a whole raft of practice-sharing activities, including peer observation, which 'took the forms of collaborative school-based subject curriculum planning, lesson planning and instructional material development, and peer lesson observations' (Lai & Cheung, 2013:346). Similarly, in Europe, peer observation was observed to take place in Greece, most notably at school B, where 'an informal strategy [was] implemented by teachers to improve

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<sup>5</sup> In Greece, the role of the subject adviser is external, and is mainly strategic, deciding the 'what and how' of curriculum implementation in accordance with the PI's [Pedagogical Institute] guidelines. (Kaparou & Bush, 2015:330)

their teaching practices' (Kaparou & Bush, 2015:333). The authors perceive this teacher-led initiative as a barrier to the principal's intervention, not least because s/he lacks the in-depth subject knowledge possessed by these teachers. This re-echoes the shortcomings of the senior instructional leaders with respect to content knowledge. However, both the subject-based (Lai & Cheung, 2013 in Hong Kong) and informal nature of sharing practice (Kaparou & Bush, 2015 in Greece) have been criticised by participants in Australia (Marsh et al, 2013), indicating inconsistent views across the three continents. Although there are mixed reactions towards peer observation at the departmental level (e.g. Wise, 2001; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Ghamrawi, 2010), these findings, and the ones discussed previously, suggest that there are more opportunities for peer observation than modelling.

#### *Professional discussion and dialogue (feedback)*

Southworth (2002) introduces professional discussion and dialogue with teachers as an important component of instructional leadership, which involved 'visits to classrooms', and was followed up with 'informal discussions with individuals, or used questions to probe teachers' assumptions and to promote ideas and ways forward' (p.84). A large number of these findings resonate with the Blasés' (2002:258) notions of 'making suggestions, giving feedback [and] using inquiry and soliciting advice/opinions', which are discussed under 'talking with teachers to promote reflection'.

Professional discussion, in the form of feedback, has been recognised as an important strategy for improving teaching and

learning. Mattar's (2012) enquiry into the principal instructional leadership differences between high- and low-achieving public schools in Lebanon shows that the principals 'were ineffective in providing feedback to their teachers' (p.525). This, however, contrasts with one of the features of effective departments that Harris (1995) identified to be 'regular feedback' (p.297). This indicates that, if the focus of IL is shifted to the department level, teachers are more likely to benefit from regular and constructive feedback.

### *Professional growth*

PIMRS final category, 'promoting professional development', is directly related to Southworth and the Blasés' notions above, and it 'informs teachers of opportunities for staff development and [encourages] in-service training activities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985:223).

Blasé & Blasé (2002) delineate this theme under 'promoting professional growth'. Of their six notions, the first three discuss 'study of teaching and learning', 'collaboration', and 'coaching relationships'. They explain the importance of 'providing staff development opportunities', promoted through 'collaborative networks' by 'encouraging teachers to visit other teachers' and 'to become peer coaches and models for each other' (pp.259-260). In addition, these authors introduce 'praising', under 'talking with teachers to promote reflection' whereby 'principals gave praise that focused on specific and concrete teaching behaviours' (p.258). However, Hallinger & Murphy (1985) caution against conceiving financial incentives as 'the only way to reward high levels of performance' (p.224).

According to Kaparou & Bush (2015), most of the CPD in Greece is provided externally, criticised by the participants for their 'ineffective nature', and for being 'out of date, following outmoded teaching practices, or because of inappropriate times and venues' (p.334). These views are consistent with Harris et al's (2000) concerns over the impact of 'courses and workshops' on the HoDs', and by extension, teachers' 'behaviour', rather than their 'awareness and knowledge' only (p.26). The value of 'in-house' training programmes in Greece is recognised by participants at school B, but questioned at school A (Kaparou & Bush, 2015:334). In England, Glover et al (1998) refer to school-based training sessions as "'hit and miss management" courses', with 'limited value to those seeking career progression' (p.289). Similarly in Turkey, Gumus & Akcaoglu (2013) report that the training topics selected by the ministry do not match the schools' needs.

However, evidence from Hong Kong suggests that external CPD is encouraged by the principals, which range from 'government-[to] university-initiated school development projects' (Lai & Cheung, 2013:340). In Ghana, Malakolunthu et al (2014) report a high degree of collaboration among the teachers, encouraged by the principals, bringing together Southworth's (2002) notion of professional discussion and dialogue, and Blasé & Blasé's (2002) professional growth. These latter indications are positive developments. However, if instructional activities are to be delegated to HoDs, training sessions should be devoted to addressing departmental needs, and avoid using them for the purpose of whole-school issues (e.g. Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Turner, 2000).

Relevant references to middle leadership were made in this section against the backdrop of LfL, as the distributed dimension of IL. As evident, IL and LfL enactments are subject to variations, confirming Kaparou & Bush's (2015:337) observations that 'leadership execution varies markedly by context'.

### **Distributed Leadership**

Harris (2008) links effective school leadership to capacity building, which encompasses approaches 'most likely to generate the foundation for improved performance in schools and school systems' (p.24). She argues that improved performance 'is best secured through broad-based, distributed leadership' (Ibid). These remarks raise an important question: What is distributed leadership? There is a lack of consensus on a unified definition of distributed leadership (DL) (Bennett et al, 2003a). However, literature implies a link between DL and power. 'Distributing leadership within and across school and school systems requires a shift in power and resources' (Harris, 2008:5). This is an aspect that has caused concern for Lumby (2013), not least because 'the central issue of power surfaces only superficially, if at all, in much of the literature' (p.583). The next sub-section is an attempt to respond to this concern.

#### Distributed leadership and power

From a traditional perspective, power is concentrated in the figure of the principal, who has positional authority. However, with regard to DL, Bush (2013) asserts that any understanding of DL requires 'uncoupling it from positional authority' (p.544), as DL resides 'in the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation' (Spillane et al, 2004:10), 'concentrating on the



interactions rather than the actions of leaders' (Harris, 2010:56). Thus, if DL is not equivalent to positional authority, and cannot be dispersed, what is then distributed? The following section attempts to address this question.

*Distributed leadership, autonomy and decision-making*

Harris (2008) explores DL at seven schools in England, in four of which the notion of decision-making, linked to autonomy, arises. For example, Harris compares two leadership styles with regard to decision-making in Kanes Hill Primary School. Decision-making was previously limited to the head and the deputy head. This changed with the new leadership style whereby 'staff could take risks and make decisions but within the parameters agreed to take the school forward' (p.77). Similarly, at two comprehensive schools, decision-making is regarded as a collective activity, as 'leadership comes from different directions' (p.83). St Benedict's School in Derby provides material evidence, linking autonomy to decision-making. Introducing three Directors of Administration, Personnel and Business & Development, who are responsible for three newly created roles of associate staff, Harris explains the extent of their authority, which situates them in a position where 'they also have responsibility for their own teams and can make decisions and have a degree of autonomy within their areas of responsibility' (p.98).

Throughout the analyses of these seven schools, Harris speaks positively of the principals' support for successful DL, and its perceived benefits for staff morale and student outcomes. Reports from an Asian context point to similar outcomes. Chang

(2011) explored the relationship between DL, teachers' academic optimism and student achievement in public elementary schools in Taiwan. The survey returns indicate a high percentage of approval rating for DL, with corresponding high levels of academic optimism.

Gurr & Drysdale (2012) argue that DL ignores the 'middle-level leaders that already exist in schools' (p.57). Thus, to respond to this concern, and meet the aims of this thesis, it is important to reflect on middle leadership, as a clear manifestation of DL enactment, which follows.

#### *Distributed leadership, autonomy and middle leadership*

Middle leadership is the embodiment of DL, and its association with IL facilitates LfL. There are several positive indications of shared decision-making at the departmental level. In Hong Kong, Tam (2010) attributes the achievements of Michael, a successful HoD, to his willingness to 'share his power and provide shared leadership [for] his colleagues, allowing them [teachers] to take more responsibility in decision-making' (p.380). In Wales, Turner (2000) discusses the positive impact on the current HoDs who benefited greatly from working with previous middle leaders, which includes, among others, opportunities for shared decision-making.

In Canada, Hannay & Ross (1999) tried to seek insights into the impact of reculturing and restructuring in two secondary schools, MacDonald and Laurier. The authors introduce four 'school climate indicators', one of which includes 'participation in decision-making'. Comparing data over a period of three years, 1995-1997, the researchers describe shifts in decision-making

at MacDonald as 'the most striking', in contrast with Laurier (p.354). Table 2.6 displays these developments.

<b>School Climate Indicators</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>
Participation in decision-making			
<i>MacDonald</i>	3.69	4.14	4.34
<i>Laurier</i>	3.33	3.42	3.66

*Table 2.6: Decision-making comparative impact on two secondary schools*

As a result of these differential data, HoDs at MacDonald School experienced a 'substantial increase [in] participation in school wide decision-making' (p.355). These developments confirm Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) advice for broadening decision-making to departments as a strategy 'to secure a sense of 'ownership' and commitment on the part of those who are expected to carry them out' (p.110).

However, there is some evidence that this recommendation has not been taken seriously in some contexts. The majority of the middle leaders in Adey's (2000) study in England expressed concern over their influence on whole-school policy. While 91 respondents (47.9%) rated their influence as average, 60 respondents (31.6%) claimed that they had 'little or no influence on whole-school development planning decisions' (p.427). Only 39 (20.5%) assessed their influence as considerable. These findings resonate considerably with the experiences of the coordinators in Javadi's (2014) study at an international secondary school in Malaysia.

Buckby's (1997) study in England points to middle leaders' expectation of an increase in their leadership involvement (see table 2.7).

Participation in Overall Leadership of the School Number of Responses for Each Rating on 0-5 Scale						
	0	1	2	3	4	5
<b>IS</b>	1	6	4	1	1	
<b>SHOULD BE</b>		1	1	7	2	2

*Table 2.7: Buckby's reproduced HoDs' leadership involvement results*

As the table shows, the majority of the HoDs graded their actual leadership involvement as low as 1 and 2, compared to the higher level desired by 11 (grades 3-5). Similarly, in China, Mercer & Ri (2006) identified 24 roles pertinent to middle leaders. The only item that incorporates decision-making is 5, 'Taking part in the forward planning of the whole school' (p.111). Following Buckby's (1997) model, these authors try to capture the HoDs' actual and normative perceptions of their involvement level, which, for Item 5, the figures stand at 1.89 and 6.17, respectively, implying considerable differential significance. Both these studies provide similar insights into leadership perceptions of HoDs at two differing cultural contexts, validating Glover et al's (1998) remark that subject leaders are 'translators and mediators rather than originators of the policy and culture of the school' who 'do not wish to go beyond their involvement in their own subject domain' (p.286). This assertion, however, contrasts with the importance that Harris et al (2001) associate with middle leaders as 'important gatekeepers to change and development within the subject' (p.84).

The body of literature on DL makes numerous explicit references to 'expertise' (e.g. Bennett et al, 2003a) alongside terms such as skills, potential and abilities (e.g. Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005). However, although expertise is a precondition

for DL, it is not sufficient. To enable professionals to apply their expertise, it is equally vital to grant them the autonomy to do so. This is evident in the experience of this member of staff where the principal's shift from delegated to distributed model of leadership resulted in 'an increase in autonomy and trust combined with lower levels of monitoring' (Chapman et al, 2007:7). The degree of autonomy can be discerned via three elements; consultation, decision-making and implementation.

*Autonomy: decision-making, consultation and implementation*

Expertise and its associated notions, teaching, learning and student outcomes, have always been the conventional business of schools and teachers. However, only autonomy and its associated notions, decision-making, consultation and implementation, can determine the degree of leadership distribution. For example, the principals in Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett's (2005:63) study speak about a framework of practice which allows them to be 'consultative leaders [which] consists of encouraging the involvement of staff in decision-making and developing policy'. Describing Arden Primary School in England, Harris (2005a) compares the distinct leadership approaches of two leaders. The first head who 'had employed a more traditional, top-down management style ... took the decisions, without much consultation with staff' (p.15). Initially walking the same footsteps, his successor chose to broaden the leadership base by 'developing more autonomy among the staff' by insisting that "'you don't need to ask me everything; you don't need to ask permission'" (p.15).

Despite these positive remarks, caution needs to be exercised in order not to link any indication of consultation to broad-based leadership opportunities. Situating consultation against a background of collegiality, Bush (1997:69) rejects that 'informal consultations' equate to 'collegiality', the essence of which 'is participation in decision-making'. However, broad-based decision-making authority has not always been welcome. For instance, in the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Barth (1990) describes how this news caused anger among teachers that why' it has taken so long to include them, with suspicion that they are being tricked, and with confidence that the revolution is now at hand' (pp.112-123).

Nearly one and a half decade later, a similar, but more profound, concern is re-echoed. In discussing autonomy, Mayrowetz et al (2007) distinguish between individual autonomy vs. collective autonomy. Individual autonomy has traditionally been a feature of the teaching profession where 'many teachers believe they can close their classroom door and isolate themselves from the rest of the school to work with their children without much interference' (p.79). DL, in the form of inclusive decision-making, challenges teacher individualism and isolation, as it relies on collective autonomy to move the school forward; 'So ironically, being a part of a team of teachers and administrators ... might actually decrease the individual autonomy that a teacher experiences' (p.79). This thesis holds the view that in an era of globalisation, mobility, 'impermanence' (Gronn, 2003a), international education, accountability, complexity and unpredictability, the amount of individual autonomy needs to be prudently compromised at the expense of increasing collective

autonomy in dealing with the fast-moving developments of this century. This conception seems to contrast with what Bush (2011:74) suggests for professional authority:

Professional authority occurs where decisions are made on an individual basis rather than being standardised. Education necessarily demands a professional approach because pupils and students need personal attention. Teachers require a measure of autonomy in the classroom but also need to collaborate to ensure a coherent approach to teaching and learning.

What Bush describes here is a subtle distinction between classroom autonomy versus organisational autonomy. It stresses the importance of 'achieving a balance point between the team's desire for decision-making authority and the organisation's need for coordination and control' (Conley et al, 2004:693).

The term 'coordination' is very important in Conley et al's (2004) remark. Coordination becomes imperative as a result of 'the division of tasks [expertise] and authority [autonomy] on the one hand and measures to interrelate [coordinate] these part-systems on the other' (Scheerens, 1997:80). Therefore, anticipating absolute decision-making authority is an unjustified expectation, as coordination is required to align all individual and/or departmental decisions, otherwise what remains are fragmented bodies of autonomous decision-makers – DL in its 'ineffective' guise!

### Distributed leadership: models

Day et al (2009:14) claim that 'some patterns of distribution are more effective than others', pointing out the various patterns of DL (see table 2.8).



Proposed by		Patterns of Leadership Distribution
1	<b>Weick (1976)</b>	Ad hoc   Autocratic   Additive   Ambitious
2	<b>Gronn (2003b)</b>	Additive distribution   Holistic distribution
3	<b>Gronn (2003a)</b>	Spontaneous collaboration   Intuitive working relations   Institutionalised practice
4	<b>Hay Group Education (2004)</b>	Instruct   Consult   Delegate   Facilitate   Neglect
5	<b>MacBeath (2005)</b>	Formal   Pragmatic   Strategic   Incremental   Opportunistic   Cultural
6	<b>Gunter (2005)</b>	Authorised   Dispersed   Democratic
7	<b>Hargreaves &amp; Fink (2006)</b>	Autocracy   Traditional delegation   Progressive delegation   Guided distribution   Emergent distribution   Assertive distribution   Anarchy
8	<b>Day et al (2007)</b>	Consultative distribution   Decisional distribution
9	<b>Spillane &amp; Diamond (2007)</b>	Collaborated distribution   Collective distribution   Coordinated distribution
10	<b>Leithwood et al (2007)</b>	Planful alignment   Spontaneous alignment   Spontaneous misalignment   Anarchic misalignment
11	<b>Ritchie &amp; Woods (2007)</b>	Embedded   Developing   Emerging
12	<b>Muijs &amp; Harris (2007)</b>	Developed   Emergent   Restricted
13	<b>Youngs (2008)</b>	Managerial → Holistic   Dispersed → Concentrated

*Table 2.8: Proposed distributed leadership models & patterns*

These models suggest the tendency for DL patterns to move along a continuum of (extremely) limited distribution to more inclusive. In a study of 12 universities in the UK, Bolden et al (2009) identified two broad categories of leadership distribution; “Devolved”, associated with top-down influence, and “emergent”, associated with bottom-up and horizontal influence’ (p.257). The most important implication of Table 2.8 and Bolden et al’s (2009) study is that DL patterns vary, and within a pattern, variations may manifest themselves along a scale. This is evident in the useful examples Harris (2008) provides of these variations within schools in England. In Kanes Hill Primary School, for example, while DL enactment has led to sustainable autonomy, in John Cabot Academy, this enactment has resulted in cultural cohesion:

The head believes that distributing leadership at the school has played a major part in the school’s transformation ... The systems set in place are running very effectively without her presence. (p.77)

I think the culture is a very positive one ... a ‘can do’ culture [with] a very optimistic staff room. (P.81)

#### Distributed leadership: a selection of models

The degree and scope of autonomy can have a direct impact on what form DL will have. This sub-section discusses DL models proposed by Hay Group Education (2004), MacBeath (2005), Hargreaves & Fink (2006), and Ritchie & Woods (2007). The table below serves to remind the reader of these four models.

<b>Hay Group Education (2004)</b>	Instruct   Consult   Delegate   Facilitate   Neglect
<b>MacBeath (2005)</b>	Formal   Pragmatic   Strategic   Incremental   Opportunistic   Cultural
<b>Hargreaves &amp; Fink (2006)</b>	Autocracy   Traditional delegation   Progressive delegation   Guided distribution   Emergent distribution   Assertive distribution   Anarchy
<b>Ritchie &amp; Woods (2007)</b>	Embedded   Developing   Emerging

*Table 2.9: Four selected distributed leadership models*

Ritchie & Woods (2007) provide the broadest picture of variations in DL:

- Embedded
- Developing
- Emerging

Ritchie & Woods (2007:375) found that 'embedded' DL 'had become part of "the way they [the participants] do things"'. They use 'developing' to describe schools 'on a journey towards DL becoming more embedded within the culture' (p.376). Ritchie & Woods' final category is 'emerging' whereby the schools 'were much nearer the beginning of the journey towards DL'.

There is considerable overlap between Hay Group Education (2004) and Hargreaves & Fink's (2006) models, which will be discussed concurrently. A leadership style without autonomy is likely to be equivalent to 'instruct' or 'autocracy', where 'staff are told what to do' (Arrowsmith, 2004:31) as 'the principal, sometimes assisted by a small group of formal leaders such as

department heads, makes all the important decisions ...' (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006:114). A leadership style with opportunities for consultation is parallel with 'consult', where 'staff views are solicited and staff are informed about school-wide plans' (Arrowsmith, 2004:31). With accountability added, i.e. consultation + accountability, then the outcome is likely to be 'delegate', where 'staff are held responsible for areas of responsibility where they have discretion' (Ibid: 31). This pattern is roughly equivalent to 'traditional/progressive delegation'. Hargreaves & Fink (2006) dissociate DL from delegation; 'Distributed leadership means more than delegated leadership' (p.116) – DL is not delegation (Harris, 2003a).

On a related note, the shortcomings of delegation for professional development have been identified as some members think that 'after doing the job once or twice there is little justification for the view that it is good for your development' (Ibid). In Turner's (2000:308) enquiry in Wales, an English HoD refers to delegation as an 'art', which can be 'complex', the ineffective form of which 'can spread absolute mayhem all over the place and cause all sorts of ill feeling'.

Hargreaves & Fink (2006) introduce two additional models to those offered by Hay Group Education (2004); 'guided/emergent distribution'. Hargreaves & Fink (2006) describe how 'a student turnover rate of over 40%' (p.118), combined with 'a very high annual turnover of staff' (p.121), at a Sydney-based school forced principal Lewis to 'purposefully and skilfully design a structure and develop a culture that really engaged teachers in improving teaching and learning'. However, what her approach relied on was

person-driven, and what it lacked was sufficient autonomy. Although the authors are unaware of the fate of principal Lewis and her school, they relate another story with a clear fate. They speak about two principals of two separate secondary schools who re-structured and re-cultured their schools, but ignored autonomy, as all they did was 'still heavily dependent on their presence and direction' (p.121).

While Hargreaves & Fink's (2006) 'emergent distribution' echoes Gronn's (2000:324) view that leadership is 'fluid and emergent', relying on 'multiple sources of influence within any organisation ...' (Harris, 2013:545), the most inclusive form of DL takes place in Hay Group Education's (2004) 'facilitate', and Hargreaves & Fink's (2006) 'assertive distribution', where 'staff are actively supported in making an impact on the wider school: ideas from every level are taken up' (Arrowsmith, 2004:31). In this model, 'teachers in a school feel free to challenge the principal or superintendent and are actively empowered to do so ...' (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006:132). A lesson that these models offer is that what causes a DL model to succeed or fail is not determined by its type, i.e. consult, delegate or facilitate, but by the circumstances in which these models are chosen and exercised.

MacBeath (2005) has identified six models of distribution. The 'formal' distribution is the most 'risk-free' model by which 'a newly appointed head may make little change in formal responsibilities and most new heads tread warily in their first months' (p.357). Conceiving this model as DL is contentious, as it describes leadership in its traditional sense. In other words, schools have always been operating in terms of hierarchy, not only in England where the focus of MacBeath's enquiry is, 'English schools are by

history and nature hierarchical' (p.357), but all over the world. After all, the intended aim of DL is to detach it from the positional authority, and this is a feature that barely fits MacBeath's 'formal' model.

The second model MacBeath introduces is 'pragmatic'. He describes it as a reactionary model that school leaders may adopt to deal with unexpected demands. The key feature of this model requires a knowledge base of the capability, expertise and reliability of the staff members who can be 'entrusted with a leadership role and those who can be talked into some form of cooperation, as well as avoiding those who simply "divert your energy"' (p.358).

'Strategic' distribution encompasses both sustainability and recruitment aspects; '[It] is focused on a longer-term goal of school improvement. It is expressed most saliently in a carefully considered approach to new appointments' (p.359). MacBeath's following quotation in this section addresses the high staff turnover in international school contexts:

But one of my biggest worries ... is the thought that if you give a particular specialism to any one individual, that the institution is weakened [for] the consequences of the individual ... not being there next year. (Secondary school headteacher, p.359)

The fourth model, 'incremental', borrows dimensions from 'pragmatic' and 'strategic'. 'Its distinctive purpose is sponsored growth. Its orientation is essentially a professional development one in which as people prove their ability to exercise leadership they are given more' (p.360). At first glance, this model seems to be operating on grounds of fairness, but it can become a 'trap',

not least because the individual who is assigned more responsibilities may deprive others of developing leadership capacity – precisely the same scenario to avoid in ‘pragmatic’ model.

As the fifth model, MacBeath introduces ‘opportunistic’ distribution which is ‘taken’, ‘assumed’ and ‘opportunistic rather than planned’; ‘It suggests a situation in which there is such strength of initiative within the school that capable, caring teachers willingly extend their roles to school-wide leadership’ (p.361). The most likely scenarios to envisage for the emergence of this model is when there is poor top-down leadership, or when an aspect of school has been left to function on its own, which is again suggestive of poor leadership. An opportunistic assumption of a role here can lead to incremental widening of leadership compass for any ‘smart’ individual, and as such, can pose similar challenges to the leadership of a school as ‘incremental’ and ‘pragmatic’.

The final distribution model is ‘cultural’, and most contentious in so far that this thesis would reject it as a model, as evident in MacBeath’s uncertainty; ‘There may seem little room left for a sixth conceptual category’ (p.362). Based on the discussions about distributed leadership thus far, this thesis would like to argue that DL equates culture, and cannot be distributed along the lines that serve to define it. This argument renders MacBeath’s ‘cultural’ distribution model redundant because DL *is* culture (see figure 2.2).

<b>Distributed Leadership = Culture</b>
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*Figure 2.2: Distributed leadership-culture equation*

### Distributed leadership: barriers

There are two notions that, paradoxically, serve to strengthen or undermine DL; trust and accountability:

The evidence shows that schools with broad-based distributed leadership tend to have cultures where there is a high degree of professional trust and where relationships between staff are positive. (Harris, 2008:11)

Accountability, on the other hand, contrasts with the notion of trust, whereby expert practitioners, possessing professional autonomy, perceive themselves to have 'considerable freedom ... in their own particular field' (Metcalf & Russell, 1997: page unspecified).

Harris (2008) discusses three main barriers to DL; distance, culture and structure. Distance is a barrier that nothing much can be done to it, but about it, as Harris suggests using 'ICT-based solutions ... and ... alternative forms of communication' (p.40). Improvement to cultural and structural barriers can be achieved through careful planning. In this regard, Mascall et al's (2009) distribution models are useful:

- Planful alignment
- Spontaneous alignment
- Spontaneous misalignment
- Anarchic misalignment

According to the authors, in the planful alignment only, 'the tasks or functions of those providing leadership have been given prior, planful thought by organisational members' (p.84), leading to enhancements in culture and structure. However, the most



challenging barrier to the successful and effective implementation of DL is accountability.

In recent decades, schools have become increasingly answerable for their educational activities, e.g. student outcomes. This pressure is felt, to a larger measure, in the private education sector, including international schools, where, on the one hand, parents, as customers, have high expectations of school administrators, and on the other, are government agencies whose mandated task is to 'police' the quality of teaching and learning, e.g. by the Ofsted in the UK. While such pressures may have met with some success within the classroom (instructional expertise/individual autonomy), it has not been as successful at the whole-school level (organisational autonomy). There is some evidence that in England alone, '70 per cent of middle leaders say they have no desire to be a head teacher' due to the 'accountability pressures and other external stresses' (Harris, 2008:18).

In such a climate, DL 'requires shelter from external pressures and accountabilities' (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003:102). Bush (1997:73) cautions against ruling out 'the possibility of conflict between internal participative processes and external accountability'. Further on, he rejects the assumption that 'heads are always in agreement with decisions', and posits that 'head's accountability [may] lead to a substantially modified version of collegiality in most schools and colleges'. Less than a decade on, Bush's prediction comes true. Storey (2004) reports the uneasy relationship between the head and the science HoD in a secondary school in England. Following some initial successes, the

professional relationship between these two leaders grew sour, and all the rhetoric of the value of DL gradually dissipated. When matters had reached a head, the head teacher resorted to her/his 'position power' and the HoD to her/his 'reputational power' (pp.262-263).

Storey's account contains two victims; trust and DL. 'Distributing leadership is premised on trust' (MacBeath, 2005:353), with accountability as the antithesis of both. Despite this, Harris (2008:68) states that 'simply distributing responsibility, without the associated accountability for decision-making, is unlikely to be effective and indeed, could be counterproductive'. Considering the current policy climate, there does not seem to be a (quick) solution to this dilemma.

### **Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership (TL) is inextricably linked to DL. 'The idea of distributed leadership resonates considerably with the idea of "teacher leadership"' (Harris, 2005b:165). Despite this conceptual proximity, TL tends to be 'narrower' as it 'concerns exclusively with the leadership roles of teaching staff' (Muijs & Harris, 2007:112). Nonetheless, the nature of this connection is essentially reciprocal. DL, as a cultural approach, lays the groundwork for the establishment and growth of TL, whereas TL affords DL its identity. This understanding may serve to explain why, in order to learn about DL, one has to begin from TL (Harris, 2005a), which is discussed below.

#### Teacher leadership: evidence

The themes discussed in relation to DL – autonomy, distribution models and barriers, can be extended to TL. For example, Hannay

& Ross's (1999) study in Canada reflects voices that expected decision-making be extended to all staff, not just a few. This expectation, or desire, is well captured in this statement of Harris (2000:82) that 'for strategy to be successfully implemented, staff at all levels in an organisation need to be involved in decision-making and policy formation', leading to 'effective management' (Busher & Harris, 1999:314).

Liljenberg (2015) examined the influence of TL in three Swedish schools. Introducing several government initiatives, the author announces delegation of responsibilities from principals to teacher teams by involving them in decision-making. Liljenberg adds that the teacher teams work 'with cross-disciplinary structure', and are an "institutionalised practice" in most Swedish schools' (p.153). In this sense, their activities can be conceived of encompassing aspects similar to those carried out by middle leaders. Liljenberg presents the findings of her case studies in three sections, one of which addresses decision-making. In the first case study, the North School, decision-making was identified to be 'limited to student welfare, organisational issues and to an exchange of teaching materials' (p.158). Contrary to this school, where 'individualism' (p.158) was identified to undermine the effectiveness of TL, in the South School, decision-making was considered to be a 'collective responsibility' (p.161), but still confined to 'classroom work and improvement work' (p.161). This positive feature of shared decision-making, identified in this school, was regarded as a cause for discomfort for some of the teachers at the West School. These teachers expressed concern that 'joint decisions directed the way they did their work with students' (p.163). These different perceptions and practices verify

Busher & Harris's (1999) observation that the involvement of HoDs and, by extension, the teachers in decision-making 'is likely to vary according to the nature of the organisation, the management approach of senior staff and the culture of the organisation' (p.314).

The latter two notions are evident in several accounts, which point to the principals' support, or lack of it, and facilitating/hindering culture. In Singapore, Heng & Marsh (2009) admire the principals for creating 'open school cultures' and 'a no-blame culture' (p.532). From the middle leadership perspective, Ribbins's (2007) ethnographic study of leadership in a secondary school in England, undertaken in the 1980s, recounts the successful story of "David Potts" and his collegial approach to leading his department. This effective middle leadership practice in England can be matched with the successful experience of Michael, an HoD in Hong Kong who 'aimed at developing good communication and creating a harmonious working relationship with colleagues' (Tam, 2010:378)

However, DL and/or TL have not always received due attention as has been the case in Singapore, England and Hong Kong above. For example, in the Swedish context, Liljenberg (2015) explains that, in the North School, effective implementation of the government-mandated development work was hampered due to, among other factors, the 'absence of support from the principal' (p.158). Similarly, in the South School, where there were more positive indications of progress, the teachers were deprived of the principal's support, with a negative impact on 'a unified approach' (p.161). Liljenberg (2015) describes similar circumstances in relation to the West School, where 'the principal stepped back in

a lot of the development work and did not lead the work forward' (p.163). Despite these shortcomings, the report is generally positive about the DL developments in the case study schools, however, points out the differential approach of each school in relation to leadership and structure.

The absence of principals' support in Sweden resonates closely with the TL conditions in Lebanon. According to Ghamrawi (2010), of all the nine principals who thought the promotion of TL was the responsibility of the middle leaders, only two 'suggested that this has been a joint task of both principals and subject leaders' (p.308). In a rare insight, a teacher in one of Ghamrawi's case study schools highlights the parents' implicit role in paving the path towards TL:

I had to work with a very authoritarian coordinator ... A big clash took place between us, but my knowledge that parents really appreciated what I was doing made me go on and ... I taught my coordinator ... that I couldn't carry out things I didn't believe in ... but I know that this ... requires you to take very big risks ... you might lose your job! (P.317)

As admitted by this teacher, lack of compliance may cost a teacher her/his job, especially in private settings, e.g. international schools where most teachers are recruited on the basis of 'short-term contracts of 1 or 2 years' (Squire, 2001:96). Moreover, this teacher's confrontational experience serves to illustrate the point that, not only can leadership be located at any level in a school, it also testifies that, when there is a will, an effective TL can be created and nested within an unsupportive atmosphere of DL.

Two conceptually similar, but methodologically contrasting, trans-Atlantic studies provide further useful insights into the practice of

TL in the USA and the UK. In a large-scale quantitative study, Xie & Shen (2013) examine TL in US public schools. An important feature of Xie & Shen's research is the differentiation between school sections; 'School levels appear to be an important mediating variable in studying various aspects of school leadership' (p.332). These considerations led the authors to ask the following research questions:

- How do US public school teachers perceive the level of their leadership in various areas?
- Are there consistent patterns of teacher leadership that distinguish teachers at the elementary and secondary school levels?

The authors extracted the data from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (<https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/sass/>). This survey consists of two identical questionnaires for public and private schools, the former being the focus of attention for the authors. Section 8 of this questionnaire enquires about teachers' decision-making, and contains the following items:

<b>Items for areas of school operation</b>	<b>Items for areas of classroom operation</b>
Setting performance standards for students	Selecting textbooks and other materials
Establishing curriculum	Selecting content, topics and skills to be taught
Determining the content of professional development programme	Selecting teaching techniques
Evaluating teachers	Evaluating and grading students
Hiring new full-time teachers	Disciplining students
Setting discipline policy	Determining the amount of homework to be assigned
Deciding how the school budget will be spent	

*Table 2.10: Items for teacher leadership variables*

The items on the left-hand side of the table are representative of responsibilities that are commonly conducted through formal leadership roles, whereas the items on the right-hand side of the table represent instructional tasks. The authors provide some useful statistical information, with its salient features captured in the following discussion.

To measure the extent of teachers' leadership involvement, Xie & Shen quantify the items in Table 2.10 on a four-point scale ranging from 'No influence', to 'Minor', 'Moderate' and 'A great deal of' influence. Table 2.11 below summarises the highest grade reported for each item.

<b>Items for areas of school operation</b>	<b>No influence</b>	<b>Minor influence</b>	<b>Moderate influence</b>	<b>A great deal of influence</b>
Setting performance standards for students			37.1	
Establishing curriculum			37.5	
Determining the content of professional development programme		36.4		
Evaluating teachers	51.7			
Hiring new full-time teachers	43.9			
Setting discipline policy		34.7		
Deciding how the school budget will be spent	39.2			
<b>Items for areas of classroom operation</b>				
Selecting textbooks and other materials			31.8	
Selecting content, topics and skills to be taught				35.2
Selecting teaching techniques				70.3
Evaluating and grading students				73.6
Disciplining students				59.8
Determining the amount of homework to be assigned				74.8

*Table 2.11: Quantified classroom- and school-based variables by item*



Table 2.11 reveals the extent of the teachers' influence within each area. While the figures tend to incline towards limited influence for school-related matters, they tend to be oriented towards great influence for matters related to the classroom. This information serves to provide a response to research question 1 above, which the authors state thus:

In US public school settings, teachers' leadership involvement in the areas of school operation is not considerably recognised by the majority of teachers, and that their leadership involvement is still mainly confined to the boundary of the traditional areas of classroom. (P.342)

To answer research question 2, it is necessary to discretely quantify the items in Table 2.10 against 'elementary' and 'secondary' sections. Table 2.12 displays the higher grade for each of these sections.

<b>Items for areas of school operation</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
Setting performance standards for students	2.57	
Establishing curriculum		2.86
Determining the content of professional development programme	2.48	
Evaluating teachers		1.70
Hiring new full-time teachers	1.87	
Setting discipline policy	2.48	
Deciding how the school budget will be spent	1.91	
<b>Items for areas of classroom operation</b>		
Selecting textbooks and other materials		3.05
Selecting content, topics and skills to be taught		3.17
Selecting teaching techniques		3.73
Evaluating and grading students		3.78
Disciplining students	3.55	
Determining the amount of homework to be assigned	3.65	

*Table 2.12: Quantified classroom- and school-based variables by section*

The pattern of figures in Table 2.12 illustrates an inverse relationship between the elementary and secondary sections. While elementary teachers report great leadership participation in school-related matters, their secondary counterparts enjoy great leadership involvement in matters related to classroom and instruction. This reverse relationship suggests that, as the focus changes from elementary level to secondary, so does the locus of leadership involvement from the whole school to the classroom. Moreover, these findings lend support to Xie & Shen's claim about the impact of school section, elementary and secondary, on the practice of TL.

In England, Muijs & Harris (2007:115-116) report findings of three illustrative schools in which, based on 'recommendation from key informers', TL was perceived to be 'present'. In addition to the empirical value of this enquiry, it focuses on the 'involvement [of teachers] in decision-making and ability to initiate activities', two core principles underlying DL and, by extension, TL. Table 2.13 displays the extent to which these two elements were perceived to be present in each school.

**Table 1** Who is involved in decision-making in the school?

	<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>School C</b>
SMT* only	0%	11%	37%
SMT & MM†	14%	77%	37%
SMT, MM & teachers	86%	12%	26%

\* Senior Management Team

† Middle Managers

**Table 2** Do teachers ever initiate decisions in this school?

	<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>School C</b>
Teachers often initiate decisions	100%	25%	20%
Teachers are consulted	0%	75%	80%
Teachers are not consulted	0%	0%	0%

*Table 2.13: Results of Muijs & Harris's three illustrative case study schools*

As the tables indicate, the three schools, primary (A), secondary (B) and comprehensive (C), display variations in their provision of opportunities for teachers' decision-making involvement and initiation. While the grand picture points to school A's high-level of TL provision, with diminishing degrees at schools C and B, another significant insight is the (possible) impact of the schooling section, primary, secondary, etc., on the disproportionate provision of TL. For example, while teachers at primary school A enjoy great leadership involvement (86%), their colleagues at secondary school B and comprehensive school C are modestly engaged with matters at the whole-school level, 12% and 26% respectively. This finding in Europe is consistent with Xie & Shen's (2013) US results, which claim limited leadership involvement for secondary school teachers, as obvious in Muijs & Harris's (2007) report of secondary school B.

#### Teacher leadership: distribution models

In describing TL in each school, Muijs & Harris employ distinct terms. For example, they describe TL at school A as 'developed',

and as ‘emergent’ and ‘restricted’ at schools B and C respectively. These terms resonate with those used by Ritchie & Woods (2007), and, therefore, cause some confusion; a reminder of Mayrowetz’s (2008:425) remark that ‘significant discrepancies’ in DL may ‘allow researchers to talk past each other’. The difference here, though, is that not only is this discrepancy insignificant, there is a great deal of common ground. Both studies attempt to introduce DL & TL as developmental and diverse. Another fascinating aspect is that, in examining the findings, the distinction(s) between DL and TL dissipate(s), which serves to validate claims about their reciprocity and dependency. Table 2.14 compares these terms.

<b>Muijs &amp; Harris (2007)</b>	<b>Ritchie &amp; Woods (2007)</b>
Developed	Embedded
Emergent	Developing
Restricted	Emerging

*Table 2.14: Comparing teacher leadership terms*

Muijs & Harris (2007) divide their discussion about each school into these sections:

- A contextual introduction plus some reflections, e.g. about the TL type, i.e. developed, emergent or restricted
- Factors facilitating & inhibiting TL

In school A, ‘a large primary school’ which serves ‘a socio-economically disadvantaged’ area with ‘high levels of poverty’ and ‘many single parent families’ (p.116), Muijs & Harris (2007) identified several features which contributed to TL. First, decisions were taken collectively with opportunities for initiating decisions. Secondly, the interview data revealed ‘a high degree of support for teacher initiative’ (p.116). The key factor that facilitated TL

was a shift in culture, which led to the creation of a trusting environment, hence 'a culture of trust' (p.119). Another factor was restructuring the school which involved the 'establishment of cross subject teams' (p.119).

The authors identified two main barriers to TL. The first one concerns teachers' leadership apathy, preferring to see themselves 'only as classroom practitioners' (p.120). Two main reasons are given for this; lack of confidence and salary. Moreover, the principal's unwillingness to 'let go', and the contextual circumstances, which were reported as 'challenging', were two other factors slowing down the growth of TL.

Muijs & Harris's findings for school A provides some additional insights. The first of these is a remark made by a teacher participant, which highlights the fine line between asking for coordination vis-à-vis permission:

I go to courses or meetings with the LEA<sup>6</sup> [i.e. Local Education Authority], and I just sort of take initiatives. I don't tell Sally [i.e. the principal, a pseudonym] about each and every one. I say "can we have a staff meeting about this", and she goes "fine". (P.116)

There is some ambiguity of the intention of this teacher's question. Is this a question for coordination or permission? If the former, then it provides a powerful evidence for TL and, by extension, DL. If the latter, then some reservations could be made about the extent of leadership radius in school A. A comment by a member

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<sup>6</sup> A Local Education Authority in England and Wales is responsible for securing that efficient primary education, [and] secondary education ... are available to meet the needs of the population of their area. (Section 13, Education Act 1996:6)

of the SMT reveals the complexity surrounding the exploration of such notions:

In Sally we have an inspirational leader here, who inspires people and people look up to. And teachers, they've got the accountability, but they also want to do it to get Sally's approval, to please Sally, and that is very important too in a leader. (P.120)

The need for human 'touch' takes centre stage, a necessity, or perhaps an 'excuse', to interact and stay in touch.

One other insight from school A points to the arguments (e.g. Harris, 2004) and counter-arguments (e.g. Hartley, 2010) about the possibility of reconciling TL and DL with the formal structure of schools. The evidence Muijs & Harris (2007) provide from school A suggests congruence between the two:

This is not to suggest an absence of clear line management structures; in fact the reverse appeared to be true. The teams were seen as confident about reporting lines and about where to seek help from the SMT. (P.119)

A discussion of line management necessitates revisiting 'accountability'. Earlier, this thesis had placed accountability against autonomy, where the former may erode the latter. Muijs & Harris (2007) do not discuss this matter in detail, nevertheless, given the overall leadership picture, it appears that accountability and autonomy have managed to reach a compromise:

While everyone is given leadership opportunities at School A, it is clear that there is an associated degree of expectation, responsibility and accountability. (Pp.119-120)

The secret behind the coexistence of TL, as an aspect of DL, and accountability, as associated with line management, could boil down to trust, as the product of effective culture. After all, 'distributing leadership is premised on trust' (MacBeath, 2005:353).

#### Teacher leadership: barriers

In Muijs & Harris's research, TL in schools B, a secondary, and C, a comprehensive, was not perceived as powerfully endorsed and practised as in school A. Findings from these two schools provide some additional insights. First, the connection between successful TL/DL and a specific socio-economic situation (SES) seems to be loose. This is evident in the disadvantaged school A with perceived successful TL contrasted with the affluent school C with limited TL. Despite this, it can be deduced from these case studies that a low SES may impact on TL, anyway. For example, lack of time was cited as a barrier to TL, which, in turn, was a by-product of a disadvantaged catchment area; 'School B is a challenging school, which means that teachers generally have to work much harder than schools in less challenging ones' (p.124). This comment is also reminiscent of the amount of time middle leaders spend with students with discipline issues, which, according to Wise & Bennett (2003), can be 'between one and five hours' (p.17).

Another useful lesson from this study is the notion of 'comparison' and its link to retention rate, which resonates well with international school settings. A teacher in school B states this:

"There are no barriers to teacher initiative here. I would have felt that in other schools. I think that's one of the reasons I stayed here". (Muijs & Harris, 2007:122)



This remark serves to validate Katzenmeyer & Moller's (2001) view about the positive impact of TL on teacher retention. The final insight that can be obtained from Muijs & Harris's (2007) study is the lack of clarity in regard to role and vision; 'I think if roles were more clearly defined then it would be easier' (A teacher, p.127). Finally, Muijs & Harris (2007) reach a similar conclusion to that of Mascall et al (2009) that

For teacher leadership to be successful, it has to be a carefully orchestrated and deliberate process ... [with] a fundamental cultural shift in the vision and values of the organisation. (P.129)

## **Overview**

This chapter discusses middle leadership in terms of their roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement. The empirical data examined middle leadership practice in diverse contexts and in the closing and opening decades of two centuries. They serve to demonstrate that, despite the passage of time, many features of middle leadership persist, regardless of location. The roles are varied, the responsibilities are heavy, the role relationships are tense, the instructional engagement lacks rigour, and leadership involvement is limited. Middle leaders, construed as heads of department in this thesis, are situated at an intersection which requires instructional attention (IL), leadership participation (DL) and leadership empowerment (TL). While they are the extension of formal senior leadership, in the form of DL, simultaneously, they are the manifestation of formal TL and, effectively, the facilitators of informal TL. It is this inter-sectionality that this

thesis aims to understand. The next chapter discusses the methodology used for this purpose.

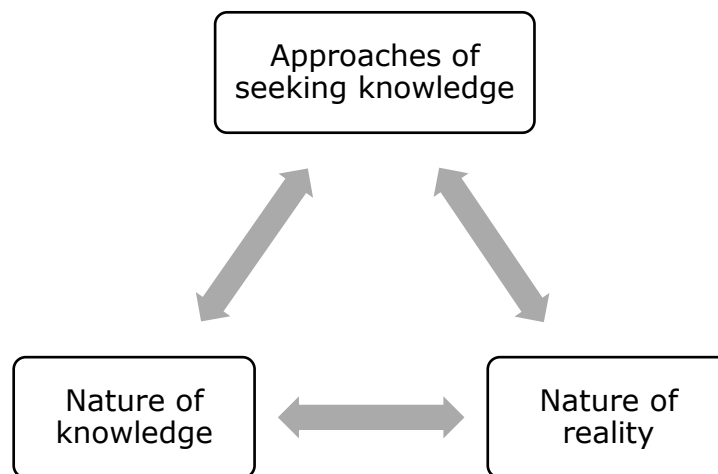
## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Introduction

'Discussing the nature of social research is just as complex as conducting research in the real world'. This assertion by Bryman (2008:22) reflects the difficulties facing researchers, both seasoned and less experienced. There is a set of issues that commonly arises when discussing research methodologies. These range from philosophy, to theory, to practice, as discussed below.

### Research and Philosophy

Marías (1967) comprehends philosophy to be equivalent to knowledge and a way of life. The differences of opinion that have developed throughout history are hardly about knowledge per se, but originate in the *methods* through which one can identify, seek and comprehend that knowledge. The key contentious areas comprise the nature of knowledge, the nature of reality, and the approaches to seeking knowledge (see figure 3.1).



*Figure 3.1: The main contentious areas in relation to research*

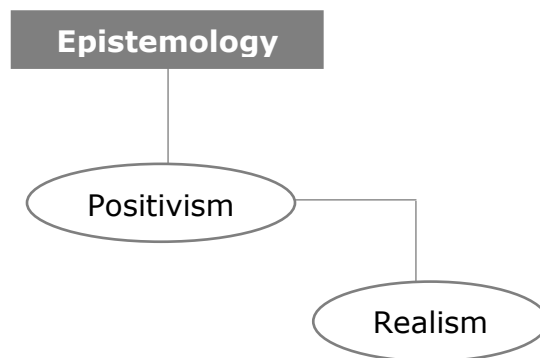
### Epistemology: the nature of knowledge

The study of the nature of knowledge is referred to as epistemology (Tracy, 2013), which enquires about knowledge by asking questions such as 'How do we know what we know?' (Patton, 2002). The answers to this question have led to the development of two major epistemological paradigms; positivism and interpretivism.

#### *Positivism*

Positivism's preoccupations with facts have immensely influenced the approaches employed to seek knowledge. Given this, positivism is not an isolated entity, nor is it boundless. It invites other epistemological concepts, most notably, realism.

Realism and positivism share two features (Bryman, 2008). First, they both hold the view that there is a knowable reality that exists independent of the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Second, and more controversially (see Bryman, 2008), they advocate applying scientific methods to human affairs as if the latter possessed homogenous patterns permitting objective scrutiny (Hollis, 1994). Figure 3.2 illustrates this discussion.



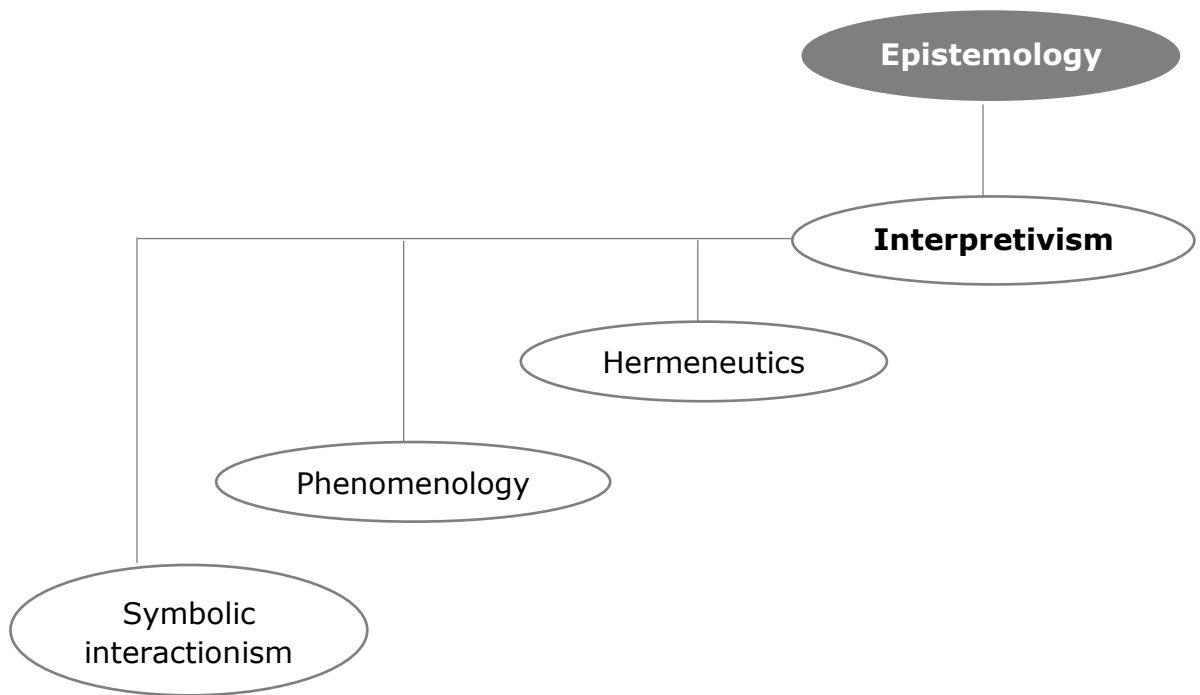
*Figure 3.2: Schematic illustration of epistemology & its positivist paradigms*

### *Interpretivism*

Interpretivism is an epistemology that views knowledge and reality 'constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice' (Tracy, 2013:62). It dismisses the application of positivism due to the 'distinctiveness of humans ... against the natural order' (Bryman, 2008:15), where the former 'is inherently meaningful' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:191). Similar to positivists, interpretivists rely on other concepts to uphold their stance; hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactions.

Hermeneutics take special care of 'context and original purpose' (Patton, 2002:114), and phenomenology is concerned with the question of 'how individuals make sense of the world around them ...' (Bryman, 2008:15). The principal theme central to both hermeneutics and phenomenology is *meaning*. Thus, it rejects the understanding that realism offers of the world, and celebrates engagement with humans; '... our understanding of the world is constructed on the basis of assumptions, rather than being a reflection of how the world actually is' (Hammersley, 1995:14).

Symbolic interactionism holds that people have the tendency to vary their acts in compliance with contextual imperatives; this behaviour originates in the 'meaning [they] attach to particular people, interactions, and objects, as well as [their] perception of that interaction' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:17). The principal dimension that the symbolic interaction tradition adds is the iterative interpretive creation of meanings (Ibid). Figure 3.3 illustrates this discussion.



*Figure 3.3: Schematic illustration of epistemology & its interpretivist paradigms*

### Ontology: the nature of reality

The nature of reality is referred to as ontology. The central question ontology seeks to address the very long-standing contentious theme noted above:

[W]hether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. (Bryman, 2008:18)

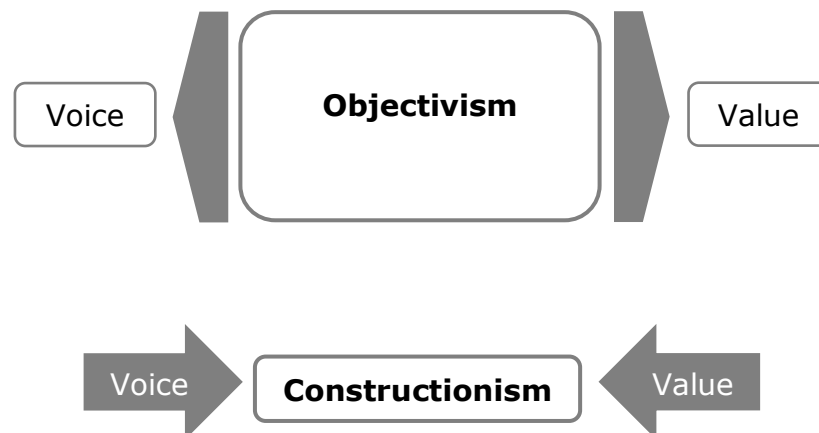
The first segment of this speculation is commonly known as objectivism (a.k.a. objectivity), and the latter portion is called constructionism (a.k.a. constructivism).

### *Objectivity*

Natural scientists have the tendency to detach facts from the research process with a view to developing a waterproof design that is impervious to external influences, or else 'any action on the part of the inquirer [and the inquired] is thought to destabilise objectivity ... resulting in bias' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000:181).

### *Constructionism*

Constructionism acknowledges humans' mental ability to 'invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience', and its ability to 'continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience' (Schwandt, 2000:197). Figure 3.4 illustrates objectivism versus constructivism.

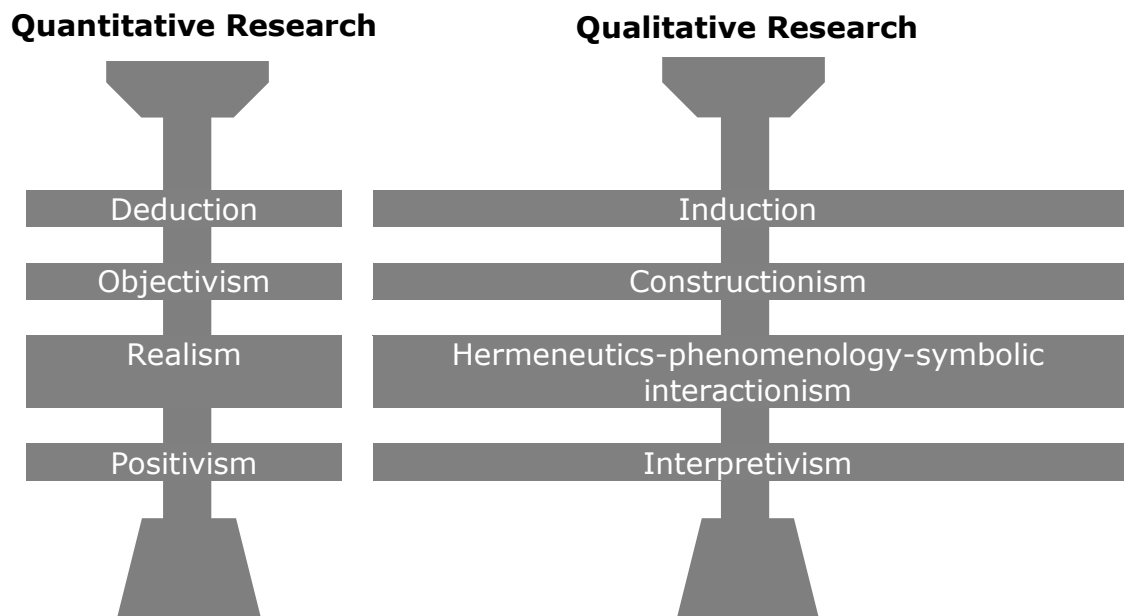


*Figure 3.4: Illustrative conceptualisations of paradigmatic ontological orientations*

### Methodology: the gaining of knowledge

Methodology 'focuses on the best means for gaining knowledge about the world' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:157). Thus, it relies on two strategies to obtain data; quantitative research and qualitative research. Quantitative research is guided by positivism, realism, objectivism and deduction (see discussion

below). Qualitative research is guided by interpretivism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, constructionism and induction (see discussion below). One difference between the two is the way they present data; the quantitative approach relies on numbers whereas the qualitative approach uses words (Punch, 2009). Figure 3.5 presents the main themes of this discussion.



*Figure 3.5: Paradigmatic illustrations of quantitative & qualitative research strategies*

#### Educational research: qualitative method

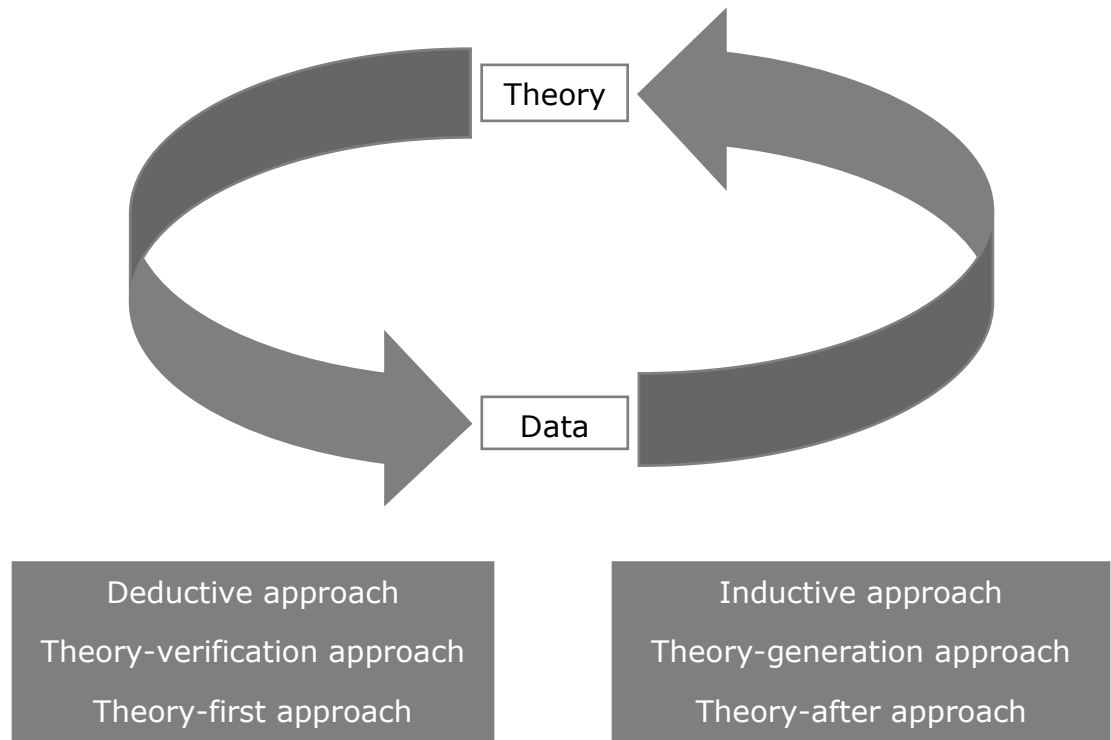
There are several considerations to take into account when discussing the application of qualitative methods to educational research, the most important of which concerns the theory-data relationship, discussed below.

#### *Theory-data relationship*

The interplay between theory and data has resulted in a dichotomy. One argument is that theory guides research, known



as deductive approach (Bryman, 2008). The alternative view, inductive approach, is that theory emerges from research data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). See figure 3.6.



*Figure 3.6: Two knowledge-seeking strategies*

According to Punch (2009), the theory-verification approach, shown on the left-hand side of the figure, tends to be more concerned with quantitative research, with the theory-generation approach more in line with qualitative. Nonetheless, he cautions against any rigid classifications as 'quantitative research can be used for theory generation (as well as for verification), and qualitative research can be used for theory verification (as well as for generation)' (p.23). He also attributes the use of these dual strategies to 'the topic, the context and practical circumstances of the research', as well as to 'how much prior theorising and

knowledge exists in the area' (p.23). In respect of the research goals pursued in this thesis, the amount of the existing repertoire of knowledge is not even. For example, while there is some evidence on middle leadership, research on international schools is still limited. Similarly, while instructional leadership is a well-researched theory, distributed and teacher leadership models are still developing. When applied to the geographical zone of Malaysia, the research scope of these areas is doubly limited. Thus, the relationship between data and theory in this thesis is theory-data-theory, involving both verification and generation strategies. The 'theory-data' relationship (verification) concerns the existing theories in the international, regional and, to a limited extent, local educational literature. In respect of the 'data-theory' relationship (generation), this thesis can make some significant claims as middle leadership is under-researched in Malaysia's international schools. 'Research directed at theory generation is more likely when a new area is being studied' (Punch, 2009:23).

This latter approach, shown on the right-hand side of figure 3.6, is reminiscent of Glaser & Strauss's grounded theory (Eberle & Maeder, 2011), which, similar to the inductive approach, advocates developing theory from data (Flick, 2011). The priority, in grounded theory, is given to the 'data and the field under study over theoretical assumptions' (Flick, 2011:55). Punch (2009:132) states that grounded theory 'starts with some research questions and an open mind, aiming to end up with a theory'. The 'grounded theory model', suggested in this thesis, is the outcome of several research questions as well as the researcher's 'open mind' to arrive at a method of transition from 'middle management' to 'middle leadership' (see chapter 9 for more details).

## **Research Approaches**

There is a variety of research approaches in the methodology literature. Bryman (2008) introduces five of these; experimental, cross-sectional/survey, longitudinal, case study and comparative designs. Thomas (2011) offers a similar list in which action research and evaluation have replaced cross sectional/survey and longitudinal frames. The goal of this study is to examine middle leadership in a selected sample of Malaysian international secondary schools against the theoretical framework specified by instructional, distributed and teacher leadership literature. To achieve this goal, the most appropriate research approaches must be employed. The least viable option for non-static educational settings is the experiment which tends to elicit results by manipulating variables (Bryman, 2008). A longitudinal design is also inappropriate as it encompasses a test-retest rationale administered at two or more distinct points of time (Ibid); this study does not intend to revisit the sample sites to make any 'causal inferences' (Ibid). While this enquiry fails to qualify as action research (AR), it does share a salient feature of AR as it aims to enhance practice. In other words, the selected sites may draw on the findings of this study to improve practice. Similarly, this study cannot be construed as evaluative research in the strict sense of the word. In a generic sense, it could entail an analysis of the leadership styles and models of the sample sites.

Thus, it can be concluded that the most appropriate research approach for this enquiry is case study, which constitutes dimensions that overlap with Bryman's cross-sectional and comparative designs, discussed below.

### Case study

The historical development of case study contains analogies with the developmental trajectory of qualitative research. Qualitative research has been criticised for being 'unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective', and its advocates for being 'journalists, or soft scientists' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:7). Likewise, case studies have been attacked for being 'a kind of "soft option"' (Robson, 2002:179) 'possibly because investigators have not followed systematic procedures' (Yin, 2009:21). Despite these assaults, recent years have witnessed 'growing confidence in the case study as a rigorous research strategy' (Hartley, 2004:323), the proper conduct of which can make valuable contributions where 'our knowledge is shallow, fragmentary, incomplete or non-existent' (Punch, 2009:123).

Case studies, though 'extremely widespread' (Denscombe, 2010), pose a huge challenge to social sciences (Yin, 2009). One of its difficulties relates to variations in definitions, which have made understanding very difficult (Gomm et al, 2000). However, broadly speaking, case study is the 'empirical' (Yin, 2009) examination of 'phenomena' (Hartley, 2004), 'events, relationships, experiences or processes' (Denscombe, 2010) in their 'natural setting' (Punch, 2009), which is 'in detail' (Thomas, 2011), 'in-depth' (Simons, 2009) and 'intensive' (Bryman, 2008). Case study aims to offer 'precise description or reconstruction of cases' (Flick, 2011:69). The case, as the unit of analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), is the 'situation, individual, group [or] organisation' (Robson, 2002:177), and is the 'focus of interest in its own right' (Bryman, 2008:53). To qualify as one, a case needs to be 'a fairly *self-contained entity*', and have 'fairly *distinct*

*boundaries*' (Denscombe, 2010:56 original emphases). The most striking distinction between case study and experiment is that in the former 'the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2009:18), causing manipulation of variables impossible in the manner that is possible in experiment.

With the exception of Yin (2009) who tends to use 'method' to describe case study, many other writers use 'approach' (Hamel et al, 1993; McQueen & Knussen, 2002), 'strategy' (Robson, 2002; Hartley, 2004; Punch, 2009) or 'focus' (Thomas, 2011). Stake (2005) justifies this preference as being a decision about methodology without any particular inclination towards positivist (quantitative) or interpretivist (qualitative) paradigms (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). Thus, while some would prefer to present case study as dominantly qualitative (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Punch, 2009; Denscombe, 2010; Bassey, 2012), others favour a 'fit-for-purpose' approach in introducing it as either qualitative or quantitative or both (e.g. Cassell & Symon, 2004; Bryman, 2008; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009; Kumar, 2011).

This 'open-minded' attitude towards case study extends to the inclusion of multiple methods (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Their paradigmatic orientations are determined by the types of methods they employ. These could range from predominantly qualitative interviews (Kumar, 2011), observations (McQueen & Knussen, 2002) and documents (Prior, 2011) to predominantly quantitative questionnaires (Thomas, 2011), among others. These possibilities influence the relationship between theory and data. The broader options of qualitative methods render case study an inductive approach (Hartley, 2004). However, this orientation by no means

limits case study to generating theories; it may, indeed, be used to test theories as well (Bryman, 2008). Thus, paradigmatic distinctions are guided by research questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), which, in turn, tend to influence data collection and analysis.

Thomas (2011) offers the most comprehensive map of case study in which he identifies four categories; (a) subject, (b) purpose, (c) approach, and (d) process (see table 3.1).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Process (single/multiple)</b>
Outlier	Intrinsic	Testing a theory	Retrospective
Key	Instrumental	Building a theory	Snapshot
Local	Evaluative	Drawing a picture	Diachronic
	Explanatory	Experimental	Nested
	Exploratory	Interpretive	Parallel
			Sequential

*Table 3.1: Thomas's case study comprehensive map*

Case study 'usually relies on one or a few cases to investigate' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:256). A 'key case' is one that is 'exemplary', and an 'outlier' is one that is 'interesting because of its difference from the norm' (Thomas, 2011:77). For Stake (2005), a case study may be conducted out of interest (intrinsic), or with a view to gaining an insight into a phenomenon (instrumental). An explanatory case study functions at a different level from an exploratory one. The former may be used to provide background information (Thomas, 2011), the depth of which cannot be matched by that of the latter where the goal is to expand 'preliminary knowledge' (Ibid:104) of 'an area where little is known' (Kumar, 2011:127). Case studies may draw on

deductive and/or inductive strategies to test and/or develop theories. In doing so, their explanatory and exploratory attributes dovetail nicely to draw a picture of the event(s) in question. Another aspect of case study is its interpretive approach.

This research is a key case study. It is intrinsic because little is known about (middle) leadership at international schools. These features render this study both explanatory and exploratory; the former helps to describe the cases in a non-judgemental, non-analytic, ‘as it is’, basis whereas the latter tends to explain and/or justify the actual (middle) leadership practices in the field.

The final category discusses the number of cases in a study, and it is at this point that case study overlaps with cross-sectional and comparative designs. Yin (2009) offers a typology of single- and multiple-case designs (see figure 3.7).

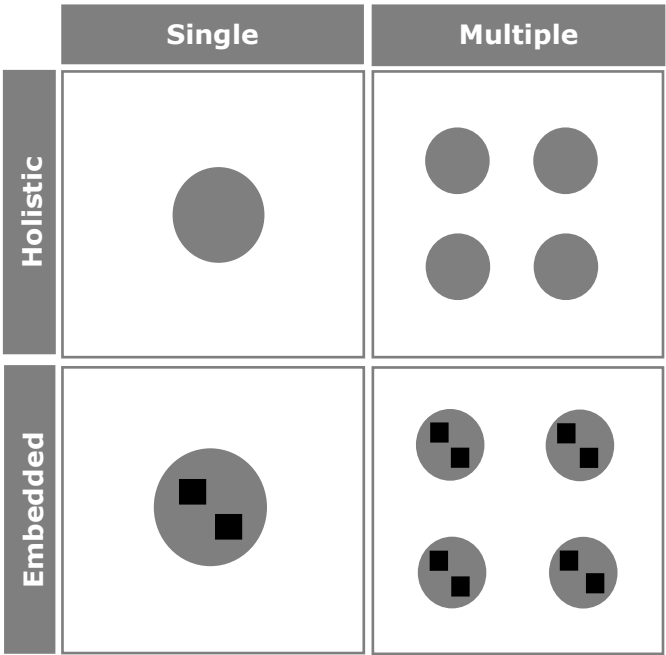


Figure 3.7: Yin’s single- & multiple-case designs typology

In this modified matrix of Yin's, the light background denotes context; the circles signify cases, and the squares indicate the unit of analysis. For example, a case study may be called a holistic single case when the unit of analysis is a school (context) with the aim of studying its headship (case). However, the unit of analysis may shift in an embedded single case when, within the same context, several aspects of a phenomenon, such as leadership, are examined. If the number of schools in the latter example increases to two, for example, then it would be identified as an embedded multiple-case study.

Accordingly, this study can be construed as an embedded multiple-case study. It is a case study because it deals with a self-contained entity, i.e. a school, with distinct boundaries, i.e. international. Secondly, it is multiple because it includes four sites. Finally, it is embedded because its units of analysis encompass aspects such as middle, instructional, distributed and teacher leadership. The next section addresses the methods.

## **Methods**

Data for this thesis were collected using the following methods; interviews, observations, and documents, which are discussed below.

### Interviews

Interviews, as the most common method of data collection (King, 2004), can be useful as they permit access to the 'human world' (Arksey & Knight, 1999:15) as well as 'insights into things such as people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences ...' (Denscombe, 2010:173). Almost all research books present



interviews as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured, belonging to a continuum.

Structured, a.k.a. 'standardised' (Bryman, 2008), interviews are inappropriate for this study because they 'produce simple descriptive information very quickly' (Arksey & Knight, 1999:4). More in-depth information can be gleaned through less rigid structures. Unstructured interviews, for example, assume that the researchers enter the field 'without any predetermined structure ... using [their] judgement to decide what to do next' (Rugg & Petre, 2007:138). However, this is not suitable as this study was guided by research questions. Semi-structured interviews, preferred in this thesis, allow the researchers to 'obtain the individual views of the interviewees on an issue' (Flick, 2011). They entail 'general consistency in the questions that are asked of each interviewees' (Coleman, 2012), however, rely on follow-up questions or probes 'to extract more information on a topic' (Ibid), i.e. middle leadership.

### *The interview guide*

An interview guide aims to 'list the questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview' (Patton, 2002:343). It serves as a 'brief list of memory prompts' (Bryman, 2008:442), hence 'aide-memoire' (Coleman, 2012:260). An important feature, permitted by the flexibility of interview guides, involves 'probes'; these are 'follow-up responses [to] elicit greater detail from participants' (Cassell & Symon, 2004:15).

The construction of the interview guide took into consideration the varying conditions of the participants, HoDs, teachers and principals. This attention necessitated changes at two levels. First,

the wording of some of the questions varied to suit the conditions of the participants. Second, while a question was included in the guide for a cohort of participants, e.g. the HoDs, the same question was omitted in the guide for another cohort, e.g. the teachers.

Tracy (2013) highlights the use of 'the data collected thus far' as a means of modifying the interviews as they unfold. This process could involve 'adding probes', adding emergent themes, and re-formulating 'incomprehensible' questions when they 'consistently fail to elicit [desirable] responses' in relation to the overall research questions (Cassell & Symon, 2004:15). This possibility was found to be useful and necessary for some of the interview questions and/or probes after a few initial interviews at the first case study site, school A. These changes involved modifications to a few questions and/or probes in three sections for the HoDs and teachers – 'leadership involvement', 'instructional engagement' and 'opinions & feelings' – and two sections only for the principals – 'leadership involvement' and 'opinions & feelings'. These are discussed below.

The original question 5 for the HoDs was broken down into two questions, 5 and 6, and modified, to further elicit the HoDs' responsibilities, and the extent of their autonomy at both department and school levels. This change allowed the researcher to learn about the HoDs' overall scope of responsibilities, and to provide the opportunity of 'pigeon-holing' them into 'autonomous' and 'less autonomous' areas. This slight modification also helped the emergence of the 'serious/less serious' dichotomy (see chapter 8). The same logic applies to the original question 6, which

was changed to question 7, and modified, to elicit any possible connection between the teachers' responsibilities and their scope of autonomy, which led to the emergence of the 'serious/less serious' distinction for teachers (see chapter 8). In the original version, question 7 was used to elicit the HoDs' responsibilities. However, this proved to be unnecessary as this could be learned through documentary analysis. Therefore, it was deleted (see appendices D for the modified version).

Modifications were also made to the principals' and teachers' interview guides. For both these groups, the focus of questions 4 and 5, in the original version, was changed to elicit the HoDs' and the teachers' types of responsibilities and their scope of autonomy. This slight modification permitted the emergence of the 'serious/less serious' distinction. For teachers only, question 6 was modified to divert the attention from instructional assessment, which was found to produce irrelevant answers, to lesson observation, which encouraged responses relevant to monitoring (see appendices E for the principals' & F for the teachers' modified versions).

Through the initial interviews, it became clear that the participants used the term 'assess' in questions 9 and 10, for the HoDs, equivalent to questions 7 and 8 for the principals and teachers, to talk about the *methods* of evaluating an HoD's knowledge or autonomy. To ease understanding, this was changed to elicit the same information in a more straightforward way (see appendices D-F).

## Observation

There is an inverse relationship between interviews and observations. While the former tries to 'get at what people say ... rather than at what they do' (Arksey & Knight, 1999:15), the latter 'does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think' (Denscombe, 2010:196 original emphases). In other words, interviews tend to explore 'words' whereas observations probe 'actions'. Thus, they are complementary as they shed more light on a phenomenon such as middle leadership.

Observation essentially involves 'watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place' (Kumar, 2011:140). Similar to interviews, several types have been suggested for observation. Burgess (1984), among others, discusses one that was devised by Gold (1958) in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Punch's (2009:157) grouping of these is useful for convenience of discussion (see table 3.2).

Mainly participant	Complete participant
	Participant as observer
<hr/>	
Mainly observer	Observer as participant
	Complete observer

*Table 3.2: Punch's grouping of observation methods*

According to the definitions offered in the literature, the methods shown against 'Mainly participant' were not appropriate for this study as there are legal issues surrounding recruitment of expatriate staff, i.e. the researcher, without authorisation. The viable options were those suggested against 'Mainly observer' at

the bottom of the table. Of the two options, the 'observer-as-participant' was found suitable for this research. It is used for a researcher who 'maintains only superficial contacts with the people being studied (for example, by asking them occasional questions)' (Waddington, 2004:154). Waddington's 'superficial contacts' are balanced out against in-depth interviews as an attempt to eliminate Burgess's (1984) concern about 'bias arising out of the researcher's brief contacts' (p.82).

This discussion taps into the umbrella theme of ethnography to which participant observation is a sub-unit (Punch, 2009). A major reason that this study cannot be regarded as ethnography is time; '[e]thnographic research usually entails long periods of time in the field in an organisation' (Bryman, 2008:403). Nonetheless, it may better suit Wolcott's (1990) 'micro-ethnography' where '[a] relatively short period of time (from a couple of weeks to a few months) could be spent in the organisation ... to achieve such a tightly defined topic' (Bryman, 2008:403), i.e. middle leadership.

Observations move along a continuum between structured and unstructured designs. The definitions Punch (2009) suggests align the latter with a qualitative approach where the researcher has flexibility conducive to exploring complex social fields, an important quality that is not readily present in structured observation. This study employed a semi-structured observation method with relatively clear aims, the foci of which were to capture (a) the interactions and (b) the discourse. The former enabled observation of relationships and leadership activities whereas the latter showed whether the prevalent discourse was instructional or micro-political. Such insights were obtained by

visits to the staffroom and attending departmental and/or staff meetings as well as through official documents.

### *The observation schedule*

An observation schedule aims to 'minimise, possibly eliminate, the variations that will arise from data based on individual perceptions of events and situations (Denscombe, 2010:199). However, 'individual perceptions', are inevitable for this research, as it is conducted by a lone researcher. An observation schedule serves to reduce inconsistencies *across* fields. According to Bryman (2008), an observation schedule needs to have 'a clear focus' for the observer to know 'exactly who or what ... is to be observed' (p.260). In this research, as noted earlier, the 'what' aspect of the schedule was used to capture the relationships, leadership and instructional activities, and the 'who' aspect was used to record the conversations between and among the HoDs, the principals and the teachers.

There are various methods of recording observed phenomena. The type chosen for this enquiry intended to document events at 'short periods of time' (Bryman, 2008:260). This method involves 'logging what is happening ... at given intervals' (Denscombe, 2010:200), which, for the purpose of this enquiry, included blocks of 15 minutes. As Appendices G & H show, two identical sets of schedules were designed to (a) capture the events at departmental meetings, and (b) to record the developments at staff meetings. Interactions and dialogues were logged at intervals of 15 minutes with clear foci guided by the research questions. It is important to note that the design of the schedule is consistent with the 'semi-structured' nature of the observations

in that, while there are specific foci, there is flexibility for the recording of 'emerging' themes.

### Documentary analysis

Documents are 'scandalised artefacts' (Wolff, 2004) that can provide access to 'subcultures within the organisation' (Bryman, 2008:523). This 'invaluable' (Blaxter et al, 2001) method is 'a rich source of data for education' (Punch, 2009:158), e.g. international schools.

Most organisations 'are awash with documentation' (Prior, 2011:96). This can broadly be divided into 'texts' or 'electronic form' (Flick, 2011), and 'policies', e.g. role descriptions (Fitzgerald, 2012), or 'records of meetings', e.g. minutes (Denscombe, 2010).

Great care is needed when dealing with documents. Bryman (2008) cautions against regarding documents as 'objective accounts of a state of affairs' (p.522) but rather should be seen as 'a form of interpretative research' (Fitzgerald, 2012:296) with potential human interventions. Flick (2009) suggests probing the authorship, personal or institutional purposes, and the intended audience, for whom a document has been produced. Speaking in practical terms, Bryman (2008) advises triangulating documents through other methods, e.g. interviews or observation (see triangulation below).

### **Sampling**

Sampling is a strategy that allows the 'production of accurate findings' (Denscombe, 2010:23) from a cross-section of a population with a view to 'estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information ...' (Kumar, 2011:193).

Sampling is generally divided into two categories; probability and non-probability, with the main distinguishing feature between them being 'random selection' (see Bryman, 2008:168). A sample is said to have been selected randomly when 'every individual or object in the population of interest ... has an equal chance of being chosen for study' (Blaxter et al, 2001:162-163). A non-probability approach, on the other hand, rules out selection 'on the basis of pure chance' (Denscombe, 2010:25). Sampling for this study took place at two levels; sites and participants.

#### Sampling of sites

Fields in this thesis refer to the secondary international schools that operate in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. A search in School Advisor ([www.schooladvisor.my](http://www.schooladvisor.my)) generated twenty-one international schools,  $N=21$ , where  $N$  denotes the 'study population' (Kumar, 2011) (see table 3.3).



International school A
International school B
International school C
International school D
International school E
International school F
International school G
International school H
International school I
International school J
International school K
International school L
International school M
International school N
International school O
International school P
International school Q
International school R
International school S
International school T
International school U

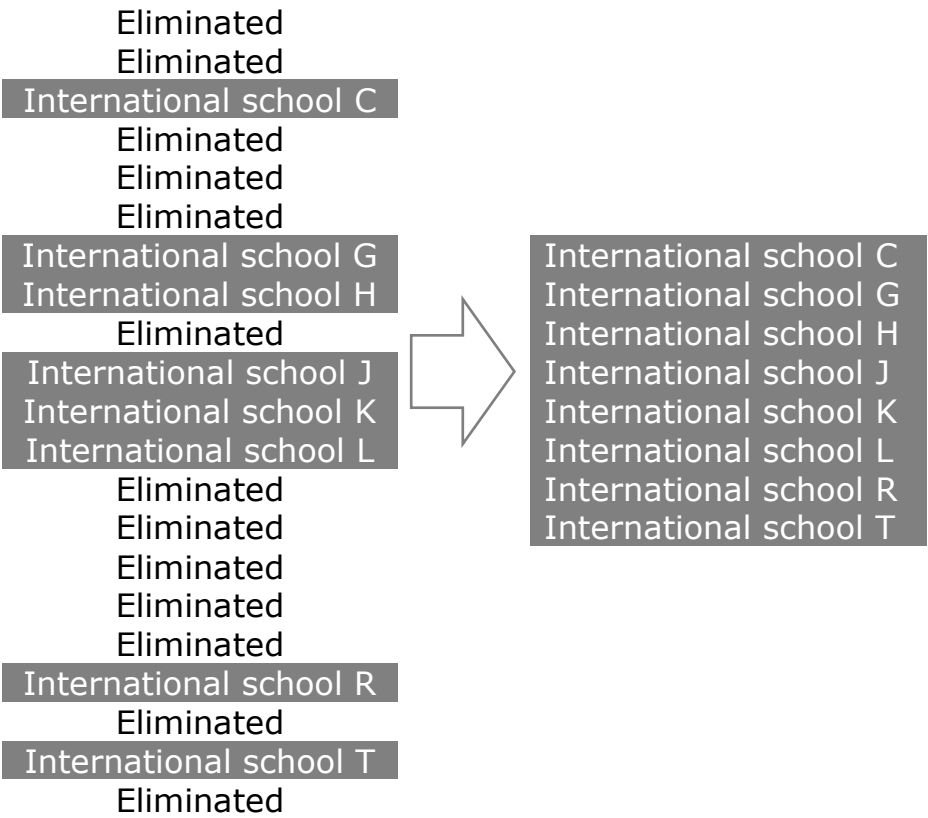
*Table 3.3: The total population of international schools in Kuala Lumpur*

To avoid sampling error, which occurs as a result of 'the differences between the population and the sample' (Bryman, 2008:168), stratified sampling was employed. This technique works upon the logic of the higher the homogeneity of a sample size, the more the accuracy of findings (see Kumar, 2011). To achieve a uniform sample size, the following criteria were considered:

- Secondary school
- Curriculum type, i.e. British IGCSE Curriculum
- Predominantly Malaysian staff

Schools that failed to meet the requirements above were eliminated, resulting in a reduced and fairly more homogenous stratum (see discussion below). Although stratified sampling may

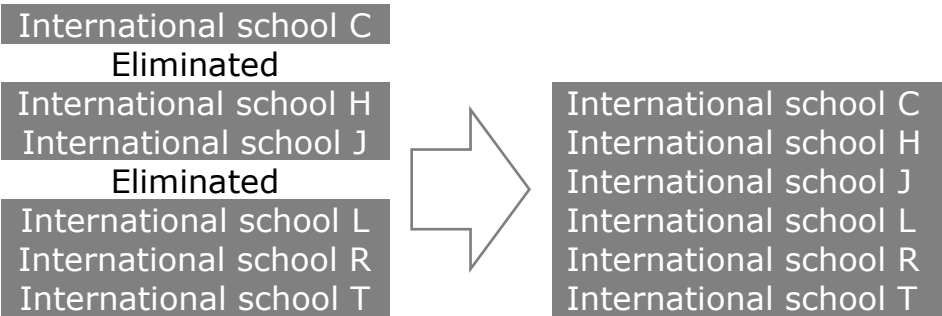
be seen as a probability approach, the researcher departs from it as he 'introduces some element of researcher influence into the selection process and, to this extent, moves away slightly from pure random sampling' (Denscombe, 2010:30). Thus, stratified sampling resembles multi-stage sampling as it is hardly 'purely random' (Muijs, 2012), and tends to 'select a sample from within the cluster' (Denscombe, 2010:30) rather than the population. Thus, the screening process yielded the following stratum (see table 3.4).



*Table 3.4: The stratum of selected international schools*

The new stratum comprised eight schools, but the aim was for four, a number considered to be feasible in terms of both time and research design. To achieve a stratum of four schools, analysing

the web pages of these eight schools was chosen as the primary point of contact. Since this study focused on international schools in *Malaysia*, it was considered to be important to identify schools that were largely staffed by Malaysians, and to investigate the possible influence of this on the practice of middle leadership, and on other aspects of their schools, e.g. the distribution of leadership. One useful strategy, familiar to and studied by this researcher (see Javadi, 2014), is that international schools' websites, at least in Malaysia, can be divided into two categories. There is a group of schools which are predominately staffed by expatriate leaders and teachers. These schools' websites contain a section where these staff are visually 'displayed'. There is another group of schools which are predominately staffed by local Malaysians. These schools tend to 'hide' the identities of their staff. Within the latter category, however, subject to availability, and as a 'window-dressing' technique, only identities of expatriate staff are highlighted. Interestingly, six schools were recognised as having no or limited information about their staff. This preliminary clue became a starting-point for the following classification (see table 3.5).



*Table 3.5: The tentative stratum of selected international schools*

Two tentative sites were eliminated (see table 3.5) because, upon this researcher's enquiry, it became clear that they were in the process of recruiting new principals. Thus,  $N=20$  was reduced to  $n=6$  where  $n$  denotes the sample size (Kumar, 2011) of six schools to be considered for research. This figure was subsequently reduced to  $n=4$  as, of the six potential sites, only four consented to this research (see access sub-section for further details).

### Sampling of participants

The sampling of participants necessarily followed the selection of schools. It was crucial to contact those who would be 'likely to have the required information and be willing to share it ...' (Kumar, 2011:207). This non-probability strategy is called purposive sampling, which was used to determine target departments as well as participants.

Traditionally, three subjects have been central to schooling; maths, science and languages, i.e. English. Typically, these subjects constitute a relatively large body of teachers, led by a head. To contact the HoDs, the principles of 'relevance' and 'knowledge' were considered, which are both central to purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2010), a.k.a. 'expert sampling' (Kumar, 2011). Furthermore, it was decided that a sample size of three subject teachers in each department would help the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of middle leadership practice. However, recalling the fluidity of the staff at international schools, unless the targeted subject teachers had been in post for some time, such an understanding would not be fully achievable. Therefore, given the researcher's lack of insider knowledge, snowball sampling was used, the starting point of which is from 'a

known network ... when appropriate candidates for a study are difficult to locate' (Dattalo, 2008:6). The known network here was the HoDs who would recommend their long-serving colleagues (see below for ethical issues). However, this strategy was unnecessary in schools B, C and D as the number of participants required precisely matched the number of teachers available. In these schools, all the teachers were invited to participate in the enquiry. To complete the triangulation of these two data sets, the school principals/heads of secondary were also added (see triangulation below).

Although the rationale behind the selection of the participants was to achieve a 'uniform' sample size, in practice this proved to be very difficult. For example, while all the school leaders were expatriates, the HoDs were neatly divided into Malaysian and non-Malaysian ( $6 \times 2=12$ ). The largest population, though, was the teachers with 30 Malaysian staff compared to six expatriates (see table 3.6).

	Participants	Malaysian	Non-Malaysian	Sample size
School A	Head of secondary	0	1	1
	HoDs	1	2	3
	Teachers	9	0	9
				(13)
School B	Principal	0	1	1
	HoDs	1	2	3
	Teachers	6	3	9
				(13)
School C	Head of secondary	0	1	1
	HoDs	3	0	3
	Teachers	6	3	9
				(13)
School D	Head of secondary	0	1	1
	HoDs	1	2	3
	Teachers	9	0	9
				(13)
Total		36	16	52

*Table 3.6: The ethnic distribution of the sample population*

Despite these conflicting figures, the overall aim of ‘predominately Malaysian staff’ was achieved as the local vs. expatriate ratio stands at 36 to 16, the breakdown of which is 10 local staff in schools A and D each, with seven in school B, and nine in school C. The total sample size at each school is 13.

### **Piloting**

Piloting is a strategy that is ‘usually carried out in advance of the main research ...’ (McQueen & Knussen, 2002:100), with a view to assessing its feasibility (Robson, 2002), hence, a feasibility study (Kumar, 2011). Bryman (2008) describes piloting as

'desirable' and is worth conducting 'even if time is short' (Arksey & Knight, 1999:95), with major benefits that permit 'assessing whether the questions are clear, understandable, [and] unambiguous, ... (Ibid: 96).

Literature suggests two ways for piloting a study. First strategy is to seek guidance from 'a group of experts in the field' (Muijs, 2012:153), e.g. the supervisors. The second strategy proposes designing a 'constrained' but 'thorough' pilot study (McQueen & Knussen, 2002).

Piloting for this thesis was carried out at three levels; the case study, the observations and the interviews. Robson (2002) points out the difficulties involved in piloting single case-studies. However, this aspect was not an issue as this thesis employed a multi-case study design. Recalling  $n=4$  above, it was deemed suitable to select the first school as a de facto pilot with the aim of identifying and refining cases of systematic misunderstandings. In contrast, piloting for the observations entails complications. Moyles (2007) suggests piloting the observations through comparing findings of two or more researchers, known as 'inter-observer reliability' (Scott & Morrison, 2006). However, this was not possible for two reasons. First, this study was a single-researcher study. Second, this was a semi-structured observation with an 'evolving' schedule, which made comparisons difficult. Despite this, Robson's (2002) advice of "learn on the job" (p.185) was useful, and sat well with the rationale behind piloting and the unfolding nature of this qualitative study.

As for the interviews, piloting involved carrying out a few interviews before 'persistent problems emerge' (Bryman,

2008:247). This strategy links to Robson's (2002) 'learn on the job' logic, which, according to Bryman (2008), can assist the researchers in gaining confidence with the interview questions, identifying the uncomfortable, hard-to-understand and to-answer questions, as well as assessing the clarity of the guidelines, and the flow of the questions. The initial interviews at the first school, as the de facto piloting site, revealed the difficulties surrounding some of the questions and probes. These, as noted above, were modified for the subsequent interviews at this and subsequent sites.

### **Access**

Burgess (1984) complained about the 'little attention' access has received in methodology books, but most recent books tend to devote a chapter, or part of, to this. Access is 'one of the key and yet most difficult steps' (Bryman, 2008:403) in research. Burgess (1984:45) states that it is a 'precondition for research to be conducted'.

The notion of 'access' is usually associated with the term 'gatekeeper' (Busher & James, 2012), or a 'decider' (Tracy, 2013), who has 'the power to grant or restrict access to research settings ...' (Arksey & Knight, 1999:64). In schools this person is typically the principal or the head. However, this understanding is deceptively narrow and simplistic. Rather than viewing access as a one-off event with a specific individual, it is more realistic to regard it as a multi-layered process with multiple individuals.

Thus, access involves 'multiple points of entry that requires a continuous process of negotiation and renegotiation ...' (Burgess, 1984:49).



Access is broadly divided into open and closed. Bryman (2008) regards schools as ‘closed’, including international schools where limited research has been carried out. Arksey & Knight (1999) advise researchers to negotiate access through:

A formal letter giving details of the intended work, including the aims, research methods and timetable; an indication of the potential advantages to the organisation itself of any collaboration and cooperation; demands on staff time, .... (P.65)

Tracy (2013) calls this ‘an access proposal’, but warns that such a proposal should not contain ‘technical, academic, or theoretical language’ (p.71).

This author’s earliest point of contact was through the schools’ open-access websites. This was followed by the first visits to all the six potential sites in August 2015 (see table 3.5 above). Of these, four principals, as the primary gate keepers, agreed for the research to take place in their schools. Schools R and T chose to deny access (see table 3.7).

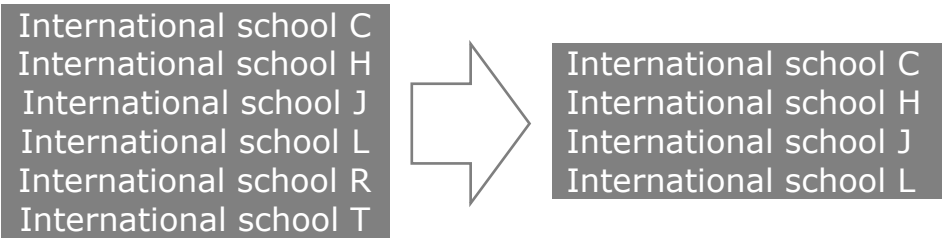


Table 3.7: The final four international secondary schools

In preparation for the visits, a simple proposal was produced, as suggested by Arksey & Knight (1999), which consists of the following sections. The first section introduced the researcher and the thesis focus. This was followed by a section that provided a

definition of the HoDs as academic leaders. The third section explained the methods, the interview process, the timing and the possible audio recording. This was followed by an important section on anonymity. The letter ended with an expression of hope for cooperation. To follow Burgess's (1984) advice about the need to renegotiate access with each and every participant, 52 copies of the aforementioned proposal were made available to each participant to read, comprehend and sign off. The front page of this proposal contains the contact details of this author as well as his supervisors (see appendix B for a sample of the access proposal letter).

## **Ethics**

Ethics is a code of practice 'to regulate the relations of researchers to the people and fields they intend to study' (Flick, 2009:36). Israel & Hay (2006) discuss three major themes central to ethics; informed consent, confidentiality and avoiding harm.

Israel & Hay (2006) argue that consent must be informed and voluntary. 'Informed' means that a study can take place only after its participants have been adequately informed and agreed to take part in it (Flick, 2009). 'Voluntary' implies that the participants are free to withdraw from the study regardless of where it stands at the time of opting out (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Informed consent can be obtained verbally or in writing. Bryman (2008) holds a positive view about written consent forms as they provide information about, and explain the consequences of, the research in question. Conversely, Israel & Hay (2006) highlight issues such as signatures, uniform wording, and the language of forms, as potential drawbacks. Despite these reservations, this study

committed itself to research ethics by preparing consent forms (see appendix C) for all 52 participants containing the following points:

- Aims of the research
- Informed consent
- Voluntary participation
- Right of withdrawal
- Dissemination of findings

The inclusion of all the participants is in agreement with the notion of access as a 'process', and is endorsed by Israel & Hay's (2006) 'cautionary' note, as some researchers may confine themselves to seeking consent from the gatekeepers, i.e. principals, without bothering to 'go to the same lengths to obtain informed consent from other people' (Burgess, 1984), i.e. HoDs and teachers.

The second ethical issue concerns confidentiality. It stresses the importance of 'protecting the participants' identity, the place and the location of the research' (Ryen, 2011:419) in such a way that any identification by a person, e.g. a colleague, or an institution, becomes impossible (Flick, 2009). Israel & Hay (2006) suggest that 'removing names and identifying details from confidential data [should be done] at the earliest possible stage' (p.82). This method links confidentiality to anonymity, respecting which can assure privacy, as three interconnected themes proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994).

The author sought confidentiality by 'encrypting' (Flick, 2009) identities linked to names of schools. School 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' were used to hide the identities of schools. As a result, an attribution to a participant appears as 'maths HoD at school A' for

a middle leader, or 'science teacher at school B' for a teacher. This practice was less straightforward for the principals; however, anonymity of schools made recognition very difficult, if not impossible. Protecting identities also reserved participants' privacy too by referring to them as 'HoD', 'teacher' and 'principal' or 'head of secondary'.

The final ethical strand involves avoiding harm. 'Most research involves some risk' (Israel & Hay, 2006:97); as a result, it can scarcely be construed as 'a neutral exercise' (Cloke et al, 2000:151). Despite ambiguities surrounding the notion of 'harm' (Israel & Hay, 2006), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2005) describes it as physical, psychological, social or economic damage. Strategies to avoid harming the participants include preserving confidentiality and refraining from deception. Deception implies a researcher's attempt at representing their work as something other than what it is meant to be (Bryman, 2008). This malpractice has serious implications for research. Taylor & Shepperd (1996), for example, claim that deception is a detriment to cooperation in research, and avoiding it can act as a positive stimulus for active participation (Singer & Frankle, 1982). The strategies discussed above, i.e. informed consent and confidentiality, were strategies employed to assure a relatively high, if not absolute, harm-free research undertaking.

To ensure that the ethical considerations in this thesis were aligned with the University's ethical protocols, permission was obtained from Nottingham University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) Research Ethics Committee Review (see appendix A below), which is a pre-requisite for data collection.

## **Data Collection**

The gathering of data contained the following considerations:

- Timetable
- Entry
- Collection
- Exit

To begin the process of data collection, a tentative timetable was drawn up for each school. This schedule comprised the point of time when the research would begin (entry), the length of time when the researcher would stay in the field, and the point of time when the research would end (exit). The duration of time that the researcher would stay in each field was defined along the lines specified by Wolcott's (1990) 'micro-ethnography'. Following agreement on access, it was decided that the researcher would spend an estimated length of three weeks on site. The first week would be spent on 'meeting and greeting', obtaining information about the potential participants and the general dynamics of the field. The subsequent fortnight would be devoted to collecting data through interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

To enhance efficiency and avoid disappointments, the calendars of all the schools (n=4) were consulted. This involved considerations of four types of holidays; national holidays when all schools would be closed nationwide; state holidays when schools across the Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory would be closed; schools' short-term breaks, e.g. mid-term, and schools' long-term holidays, e.g. Christmas.

Multiple-methods studies require unique strategies when collecting data. As for documents, both the principals and the HoDs, and if necessary, the teachers were approached to gain

access to the school documents. With regard to observation, access was negotiated to observe the departmental and the staff meetings. Regarding interviews, permission was sought from all parties concerning the recording of the conversations, which was granted by all 52 participants.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness resonates with quantitative researchers when it is referred to as reliability and validity through the positivist lens. ‘Reliability relates to the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results’ (Bush, 2002:60). Validity, on the other hand, is used to ‘judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe’ (Bush, 2012b:81). Some qualitative researchers have suggested terms that they hold to be more associated with the interpretive paradigm. These include trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) (see table 3.8).

Quantitative terms	Qualitative equivalents
Reliability	Trustworthiness
Validity	Authenticity

Table 3.8: Quantitative terms vs. qualitative equivalents

Trustworthiness and authenticity are umbrella terms. Advocates of interpretivism have extended their alternative terms to include dimensions that are used to judge qualitative work. Following Bryman (2008), Table 3.9 exhibits the original and the suggested terms for reliability and trustworthiness.

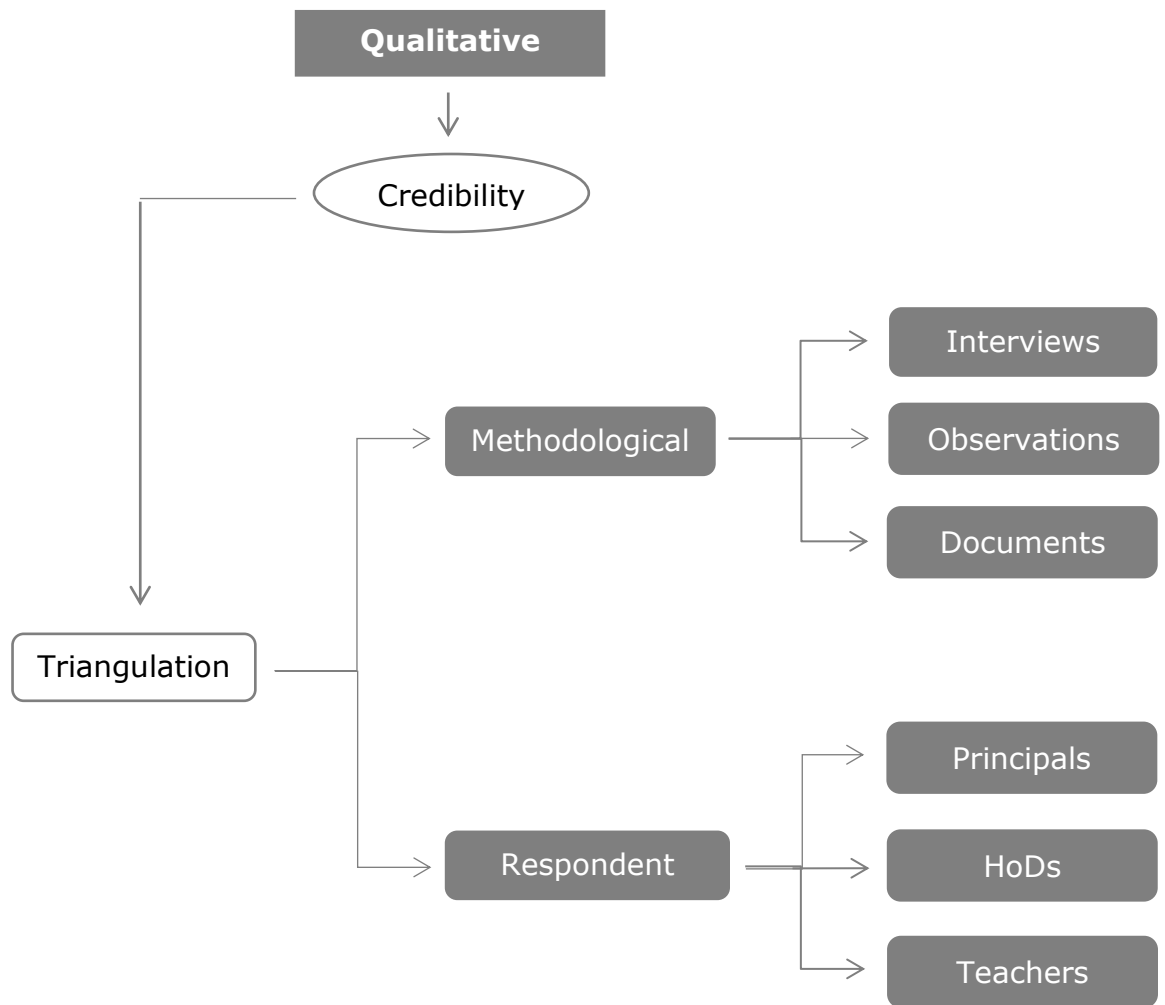
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Trustworthiness</b>
<b>Quantitative terms</b>	<b>Qualitative equivalents</b>
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

*Table 3.9: Quantitative terms vs. qualitative terms*

Credibility refers to the extent to which the data are 'free from error or distortion' (Flick, 2009:257). A major strategy to increase credibility of research is through triangulation (Bryman, 2008); '... comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena' (Bush, 2002:68). Scott (2007) has identified four types of triangulation, two of which are directly related to this paper; methodological triangulation and respondent triangulation. Methodological triangulation is using 'more than one method of data collection' (Robson, 2002:174). It involves combining methods to 'corroborate one against the other' (Bush, 2012:85). In this research, this was achieved by integrating observations with interviews and documentary analysis.

Respondent triangulation can be achieved by eliciting information from multiple stakeholders, i.e. principals, HoDs and teachers, resulting in multiple data sets. In this thesis, this was achieved by interviewing 36 teachers, 12 HoDs and four principals of four international secondary schools.

Figure 3.8 captures this discussion thus far.



*Figure 3.8: Credibility and its dimensions in qualitative research*

Another criterion used by qualitative researchers is transferability, a notion for which positivists choose to use generalisation. Qualitative research is preoccupied with depth rather than breadth (Bryman, 2008). This characteristic permits the possibility of “thick descriptions” (Denscombe, 2010), and creates opportunities for “slice-of-life” accounts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:10)



One of the central, yet 'devastating' (Flyvbjerg, 2004), dimensions of case studies, which 'needs to be addressed' (Denscombe, 2010:60), is generalisability. Despite noticeable efforts by Flyvbjerg (2004), for example, in rectifying misconceptions about case studies, one of the recurring criticisms continues to be the limited possibility of case studies for generalisability. This aspect concerns the external validity (Bryman, 2008) or transferability. Although generalisability has been downplayed as an essential goal to pursue in CS research (Denzin, 1983), several suggestions have been offered to remedy this issue. One such proposition posits that a CS's transferability can be enhanced by conducting multiple studies (e.g. Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998; Flick, 2009), hence the four schools in this research. The rationale behind this is the possibility they offer for distinguishing between analytic and statistical generalisation. In CS research, generalisation of findings is 'about theoretical propositions [and] not about populations' (Hartley, 2004:331). In simple terms, generalisation concerns 'theories (analytic generalisation) and not ... frequencies (statistical generalisation)' (Yin, 2009:15). This understanding can be reinforced by comparing new findings with other published studies (Schofield, 2000). On a similar note, Stake (2005) warns that generalisation, as a primary goal to achieve, will degrade the purpose of case study, which is the exploration of "the particular". Thus, Lincoln & Guba (2000) strongly favour judging qualitative research, e.g. case studies, on condition of 'fittingness' (p.40).

Despite this view, research texts are replete with concerns and criticisms of qualitative research for its limited capacity for generalisation (e.g. McQueen & Knussen, 2002; Robson, 2002; Hartley, 2004; Bryman, 2008; Flick, 2009; Punch, 2009; Yin,

2009; Denscombe, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Kumar, 2011; Thomas, 2011). To address these concerns, stratified sampling was used to select international schools that were all secondary, offered the British IGCSE curriculum, and were predominantly staffed by Malaysians.

The third criterion is dependability, which corresponds to reliability in quantitative research. Dependability is determined along a continuum, as demonstrated in figure 3.9.

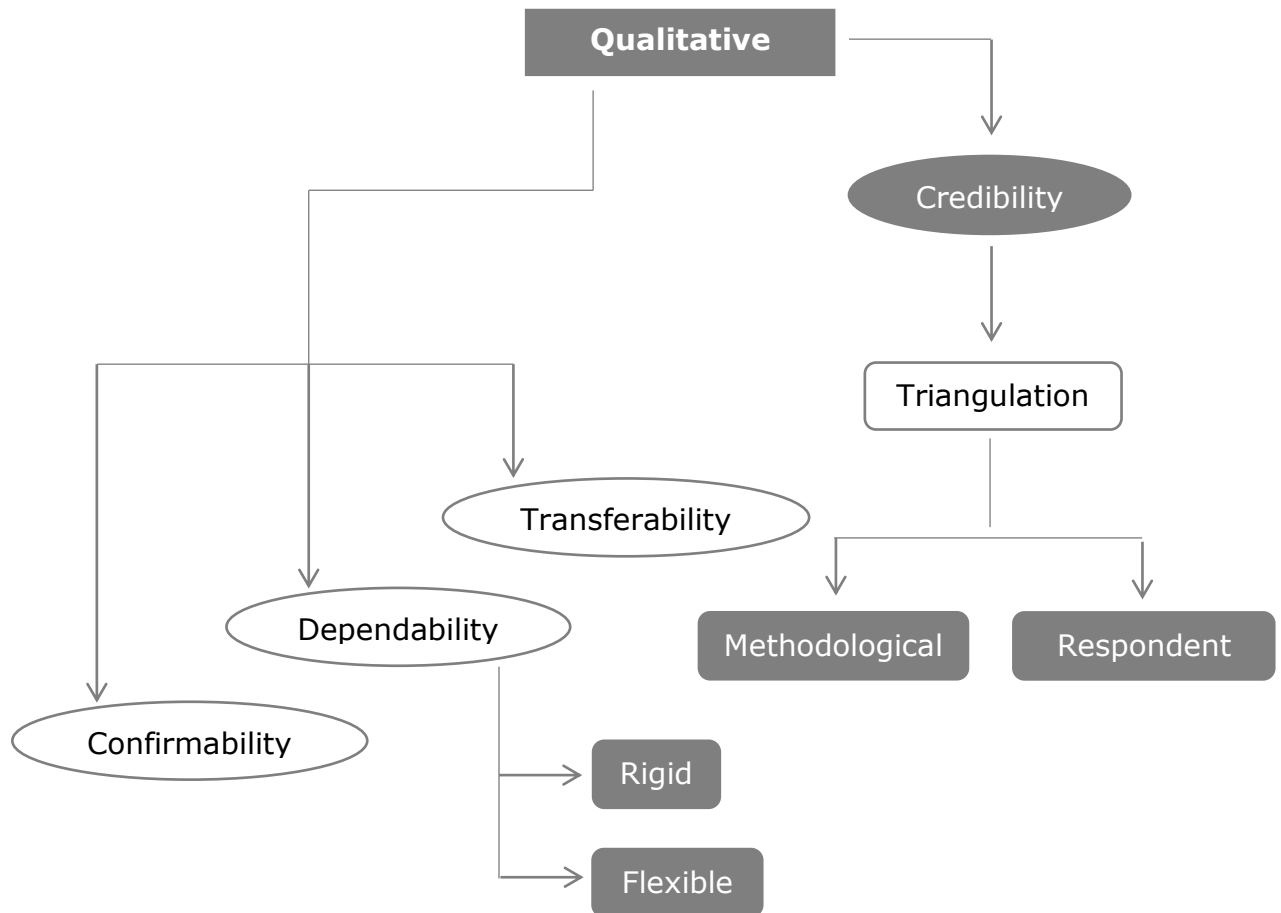


*Figure 3.9: The scale of dependability*

Figure 3.9 exhibits the scale of dependability in a research design. As noted earlier, in order to achieve high objectivity versus low bias, quantitative research tries to contain external variables. On the contrary, qualitative research is more inclusive in its approach, hence low objectivity versus high bias. As a result, the more fixed the research design is, the higher its dependability. Conversely, the more flexible the research design, the lower its dependability. The 'semi-structured' nature of the interview and observation structures has rendered this research weak in terms of reliability. However, thick descriptions of the fields and their subjects are likely to enhance validity.

The final criterion is confirmability, meaning that 'the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith' (Bryman, 2008:379). It is the barometer of the soundness of credibility, triangulation and

dependability. Thus, confirmability can be declared 'achieved' only when other criteria have been met. Figure 3.10 below captures the criteria used to judge qualitative research:



*Figure 3.10: Qualitative research evaluation criteria*

### **Authenticity**

In addition to trustworthiness, Lincoln & Guba (2000:180) offer an elaborate discussion on authenticity, which is centrally concerned with trust in social research. The authors concede that there is no definite answer to this matter; however, they make an attempt to engage with dimensions of validity, renamed 'authenticity'.

Bryman (2008:379-380) captures Lincoln & Guba's discussion in five concise questions:

- *Fairness*. Does the research fairly represent different viewpoints among members of the social setting?
- *Ontological authenticity*. Does the research help members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu?
- *Educative authenticity*. Does the research help members to appreciate better the perspectives of other members of their social setting?
- *Catalytic authenticity*. Has the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances?
- *Tactical authenticity*. Has the research empowered members to take steps necessary for engaging in action?

This author sought to address these concerns. The inclusion of varied participants at multiple levels was an attempt to approach 'fairness'. Research is a worthwhile effort at comprehending the social world, and in this case, the school landscape. Extensive dissemination of findings and recommendations, both among the participants at the four schools, and in academia, is an effort to enrich the practitioners' comprehension of their professional practice (ontological authenticity), to give a voice to their varied perspectives (educative authenticity), to raise their awareness of educational leadership theories (catalytic authenticity), and encourage them to draw upon those theories, though at varying degrees of application, to inform (enhanced) practice (tactical authenticity).

## **Data Analysis**

Although this thesis presents data collection and analysis in two sections, in practice, they 'should proceed together' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:309) in qualitative research. The literature offers diverse techniques for qualitative analysis. After all, 'there is no single right way ... [and] much depends on the purposes of the research ...' (Punch, 2009:171). The most appropriate data analysis strategy for this research is what Miles & Huberman (1994) call 'data reduction', which involves two key techniques; coding and memoing (Punch, 2009).

### Coding

Coding or indexing 'is the starting point for most forms of qualitative data analysis' (Bryman, 2008:550), and it involves 'attaching a code or a label to a section of text to index it as relating to a theme or issue in the data which the researcher has identified as important ...' (Cassell & Symon, 2004:257). Similar to this thesis, codes may be 'pre-specified' or they could 'emerge' throughout the analysis (Watling et al, 2012).

Broadly speaking, coding encompasses two levels or stages. The 'first-level' (Tracy, 2013) codes tend to be 'descriptive or literal' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), 'requiring little or no inference beyond the piece of data itself' (Punch, 2009:176). The 'second-level' (Tracy, 2013) codes are 'analytical' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), as they involve 'inference beyond the data ... [and] ... focus on pattern codes' (Punch, 2009:176). As for this thesis, the pre-set codes were informed by the research questions under five overarching headings; roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement. Linked to

these themes, are several notions which emerged throughout the data collection period.

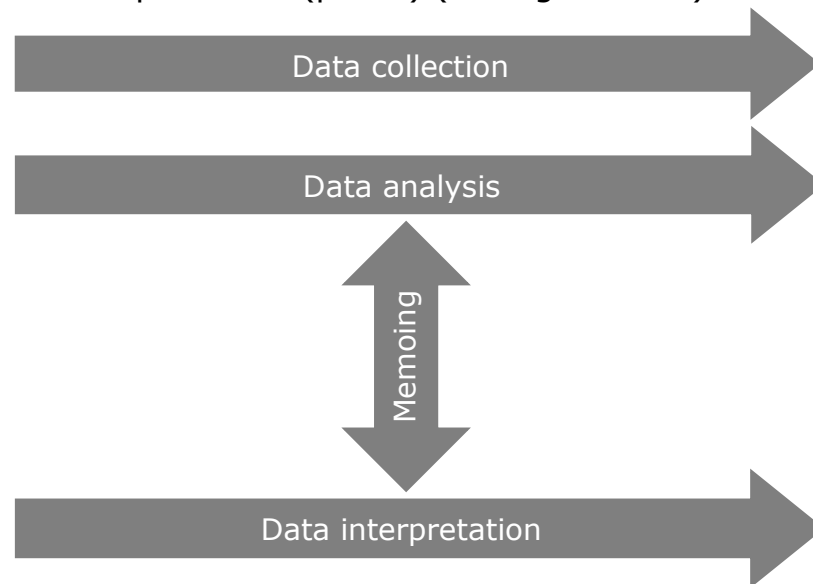
### Memoing

Memoing is a technique that involves writing 'notes that researchers might write for themselves' (Bryman, 2008:547). These serve as 'reminders' and help researchers 'crystallise ideas and not to lose track of their thinking ...' (Ibid). Memos could be 'substantive' and/or 'theoretical' (Punch, 2009), among others.

In this thesis, substantive memoing consisted of notes pertinent to the nature of the HoDs' work practices. These would tend to be descriptive linking substantive memoing to first-order coding. Theoretical memoing contained links to the conceptual framework of this thesis with a view to explaining and/or justifying those practices. In this way, 'memos ... can raise a code to the level of a *category* ... or a set of key *concepts*' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:308, 310), hence conceptual grounding of work practices. This technique, for example, was used to record the *leadership* interactions of the HoDs. While much of these were logged in the departmental and staff meeting observation schedules, memoing was used to document interactions at other sites, e.g. staffrooms. While substantive memoing was used to record the actual occurrences in real time, theoretical memoing was used at the analysis stage to assist with interpretation and sense-making. The outcome of the latter strategy is the introduction of departmental patterns of behaviour (see theoretical significance in chapter 9).

Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011) argue that the relationship between data collection, analysis and interpretation is not one of linearity

but simultaneity with memo writing as 'an important link between analysis and interpretation' (p.315) (see figure 3.11).



*Figure 3.11: The relationship between data collection, analysis, interpretation & memoing*

Coding and memoing can be interpreted as part of an approach that necessitates reducing the data by 'purposive methods' on the basis of importance and relevance (Watling et al, 2012). A third dimension to coding and memoing is 'respondent quotations', a sort of a verbatim report, which contains 'judicious use of quotations [which] brings ... research account alive, providing vivid and rich word pictures which can be very exciting and offer direct contact between the reader and respondent' (Ibid: 390). These verbatim quotations originate in interview transcripts, which this author uses judiciously to fulfil Denzin & Lincoln's (2000) 'slice-of-life' accounts and 'thick descriptions'.

Viewing research through qualitative epistemologies and ontologies brings to the fore the significance of interpretation throughout, which applies to the three methods used in this study; interview transcripts, observation notes and documentary

analyses. Interpretation of these outputs requires analysis of content, discourse, conversation and narrative (see Denscombe, 2010:280), all of which hinge upon a central logic, interpretation – reading between the lines. Thus, while coding can be taken to function under the tyranny of data as the ‘systematic and disciplined part of analysis’ (Punch, 2009:180), it is the memoing that relies on interpretation, in a broad sense, to serve ‘the more creative-speculative part ...’ (Ibid).

## **Overview**

The research design employed in this thesis was an embedded multiple case study, with in-depth qualitative and interpretivist orientations. It examined middle leadership within selected international schools, predominantly staffed by Malaysians. To achieve this aim, it utilised multiple methods and participants. The former strategy, known as methodological triangulation, used interviews, observations and documentary analysis, and the latter strategy, known as respondent triangulation, enabled the participation of four principals, 12 middle leaders and 36 teachers. These choices permitted the provision of a holistic view of middle leadership practice, which became possible as a result of the informed consent of 52 participants. Visits to the schools commenced in late 2015 and ended in early 2016, with data collection and analysis conducted concurrently. The first site was chosen as a de facto pilot, which led to some modifications in the interview guides. Throughout the research, great care was taken to assure anonymity and confidentiality by removing names, titles and attributions. Chapters 4-7 present the findings from each case-study school. The next chapter presents the case study report for school A.



## **Chapter Four: Case Study Report School A**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the first case study, hereafter referred to as School A. School A is an international school located in Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory. It offers the British Curriculum culminating in the IGCSE. It has a predominately Malaysian student population of about 1,500 with over 70 members of staff, the majority of whom are Malaysian. The school has a January-November academic calendar. At the time of the study, it was in the final phase of transition from a private local school to a full international school.

The senior leadership team comprises the principal, the head of secondary (HoS), and the head of primary. At the time of the study, the HoS had been in post for six months. He previously served as an assistant head, and as head of department (HoD) for science, but was promoted to lead the secondary school. He is not Malaysian.

### **Methods**

This study examined middle leadership through five major themes; roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement. Table 4.1 illustrates the methods employed for each strand:

Focus of Study	Semi-structured interviews	Observation	Documentary analysis
Roles	●		●
Responsibilities	●		●
Role relationships	●	●	●
Instructional engagement	●	●	●
Leadership involvement	●	●	●

*Table 4.1: School A methods*

Semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis were employed across the board to explore these themes. Observation was used to examine the nature of the participants' relationships, instructional and leadership interactions in the staffroom, staff meetings and in respective departmental meetings. The next section discusses the findings from the English department.

### **English Department**

School A has a large English department with nine Malaysian teachers, led by an HoD. The participants consisted of three teachers and the HoD. The three teachers have on average 14 years of teaching experience, although not necessarily in international schools. The HoD is non-Malaysian and has been in this school for two years, experiencing her first leadership role in her first international school.

The participants agreed to attend separate interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Observations were carried out in the staffroom to record the professional interactions

among the participants as well as those they had with non-participants in the same department. In addition, some observations were conducted in the only departmental meeting held during the course of the study. Combined with the interviews, and the observations, was the documentary analysis pertinent to the English department.

### Roles

The staff handbook articulates the HoD's role as follows:

This person will be an excellent teacher, articulate and inspiring, confident, stable and supportive, and a highly able, effective and innovative manager ... she will take the department forward ... through good teamwork, excellent management and inspirational leadership.

Given this comprehensive role definition, the HoD chose to confine her role to that of 'a facilitator of change and improvement'. This narrow understanding emanates from the perceived absence of a clear framework for instruction:

In terms of what students did, and what teachers reported, there was no rationale for why they were doing what they were doing. It was very subjective ... so I implemented the UK system of levels, rubrics were standardised and have a bank of skills; we are teaching these skills.

Although the HoD's role conception has leadership overtones, the teachers' description of her role inclined towards a managerial understanding:

She's doing her role as the HoD by giving us all the necessary information regarding the syllabus. (ST1)

She is supposed to be a role model and very knowledgeable in the subject matter, and to be able to give us clear instructions, as well as sort of like a middle man (*sic*) between the top management and ourselves. (ST2)

She is supposed to give us direction and also coordinate the classes and check on whatever needs to be done and prepare some things for us; I mean she is supposed to provide some rules and regulations. (ST3)

The diversity of the interpretations points to the participants' selective and individualistic understanding of the role.

### Responsibilities

At the time of the study, the HoD occupied multiple roles. She was the HoD, the head of learning & assessment, and the assistant HoS. The staff handbook articulates the HoD's responsibilities under seven headings (see table 4.2).

Sections	Focus
1	Planning and setting expectations
2	Teaching and learning
3	Assessment and evaluation
4	Student achievement
5	Relations with parents
6	Managing performance
7	Managing resources

*Table 4.2: School A HoDs' job description categories*

Given the diversity of responsibilities, the anticipated role boundary was delimited along the same lines as that of a change agent:

When I applied for the post, I could see there was going to be a requirement for someone who could lead on change management. I like change management. (HoD)

A similar interpretation of the role is offered by the HoS:

This year, [the focus] has been on assessment for learning, but particularly with guidance from [the English HoD] who is the assessment for learning leader.

Considering the three concurrent roles, it is evident that the HoD role has been overshadowed by the learning for assessment aspect.

#### Role relationships

The HoD described her relationship with the SMT as 'very good'. She repeated the same feeling for the teachers; 'very good, I mean, they come to me freely with questions or suggestions'. While the teachers did not wholly deny this, they did not seem to be happy either. ST1 accused her of being 'ambitious' and 'lacking experience'; 'When you teach a local, you may not understand what the locals want, so she's being ambitious'.

ST2 found her 'annoying' when she would not listen to them, perhaps because of her multiple roles as she may be pressed for time. The staff handbook permits the HoD, though somewhat ambiguously, to 'devolve responsibilities ... within a framework of clearly understood professional accountability'. Although she found it 'unfair' to delegate some of her assistant head responsibilities, she expressed interest in doing so when it involved 'smaller things' such as 'making sure the exam papers are complete or ... choosing what we are going to set for the exam'.

Furthermore, while the HoD sounded confident, there were some doubts about her knowledge of the subject matter. ST3 said she

would not go to her, and ST1 distinguished between teaching the different secondary key stages:

I think she has no experience of teaching examination years [Key Stage 4], so the method and approach will definitely be different than teaching Key Stage 3. I think that part she may have to improve.

Such perceptions contrast with what the staff handbook outlines as expectations of an HoD, who should be an 'excellent teacher' and 'establish ... constructive working relationships' and 'create a cohesive and dynamic department, with a shared purpose to achieve at the highest levels'. On the contrary, to avoid the HoD, the teachers had devised alternative means which involved online search, and contacting colleagues in School A as well as in other international schools, offering the UK curriculum.

The staffroom was neatly divided into departments, with one quarter of the total space allocated to a pantry with a restaurant-style seating arrangement. Each department space had a long table with 8-10 chairs around it. During this researcher's visit, only a few teachers returned to their department. The HoD herself was seen once only. During a departmental meeting, some teachers were seen for the first time. The HoD's multiple roles had caused difficulty for the teachers to function as a 'department':

Before I was the head [of learning and assessment] I used to be there [in the staffroom] all the time. Now I need to be here [in the secondary office]; it's not ideal. (HoD)

The physical structure of School A consists of several blocks. In one block is the staffroom, with the secondary office in another where the HoS and the English HoD are based. Such architectural

'tyranny' may have undermined effective interaction between the English HoD and the teachers. In addition, some of the respondents blamed the homeroom allocations for motivating some teachers to stay in their own rooms with personally allocated laptops. They also complained that the staffroom was 'quite noisy' – a place to 'socialise and not much for work' (ST3).

### Instructional engagement

Section 6, managing performance (see table 4.2), is directly related to monitoring. It explicitly requires appraising the current staff and providing support to the new staff:

Appraise staff as required by the school policy and use the process to develop the personal and professional effectiveness of teachers.

Ensure that new teachers are appropriately monitored, supported and assessed in relation to defined professional standards and requirements of the school's job description.

Also, under 'assessment and evaluation' (see section 3, table 4.2), the staff handbook suggests alternative means of monitoring which involve 'checking students' written work' and 'checking all assessments'.

The monitoring of teaching and learning was afforded a high priority at School A. The staff handbook contains some sections focused on teaching and learning (see table 4.3).

Sections	Focus
1	Feedback form
2	Band descriptors
3	Observer notepad
4	Teacher appraisal form

*Table 4.3: School A instructional monitoring sections*

Section one is a one-page feedback form used for observing teachers, with three aspects focused on teaching and learning (see table 4.4).

	Students' views of the learning
	Good practice observed
	Areas for development

*Table 4.4: School A feedback form – observational aspects*

The rating scale used in the feedback form ranges from 4 (inadequate), to 3 (satisfactory), to 2 (good), to 1 (outstanding). These are determined against criteria spelt out in the form of band descriptors (see table 4.5).

Areas	Inadequate	Satisfactory	Good	Outstanding
Planning				
Learning intentions				
Teaching				
Resources				
Curriculum knowledge				
Questioning				
Student learning				
Relationships				
Assessment				
End of lesson				
Meeting lesson objectives				
Use of ICT				
Homework				

*Table 4.5: School A instructional band descriptors*

Section three, observer notepad (see table 4.3), contains one page and is used by observers to record lesson observations. The final section is called the 'teacher appraisal form', which consists of three segments. The first segment requires basic information, e.g. teachers' records of achievements, training, etc. This is followed by segment 2 which deals with teaching performance,



comprising 60% of the total rating. The remaining 40% is allocated to evaluating personal qualities. These two areas are assessed against a numerical scale between 5 and 1 (see table 4.6).

5	Exemplary
4	Exceeds expectations
3	Meets expectations
2	Needs improvement
1	Not meeting expectations

*Table 4.6: School A performance and characteristics ratings*

The total scores attained are calculated and compared against a rating scale resembling the one in Table 4.6.

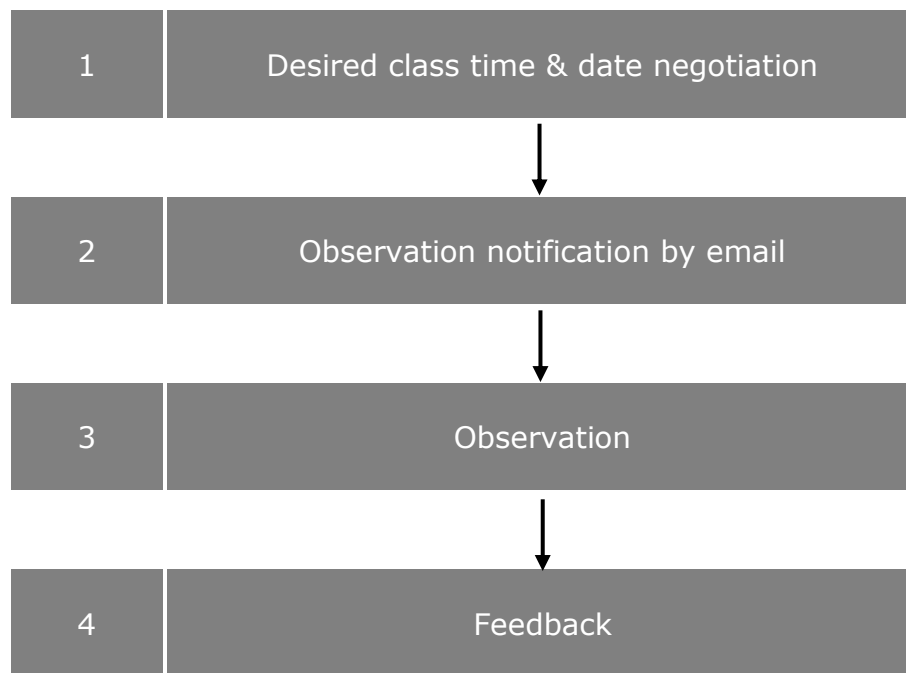
There are two monitoring mechanisms; formal and ongoing. Formal observations were conducted twice a year, and the outcomes would feed into the teacher appraisal. Ongoing observations, known as 'learning walks', were carried out less formally and on a regular basis:

I've done two formal observations of every member of the department this year ... we also have a programme this year called 'learning walks', so a member of the senior management team plus a head of faculty would normally at least once a week go on multiple learning walks which would involve dropping in on anywhere between four, six or seven lessons in a day for only 5 to 10 minutes to just make a note of what was going on and then feed back to the teacher what was in there of good practice. (HoD)

This perceived anticipation of capturing 'good practice' sounds somewhat narrow, and perhaps equally redundant, as this could be recorded through formal observations. The HoS's explanation linked it to inter-departmental sharing of practice:

It is to share good practice in the school across all the departments. So, for instance, [the science HoD] would usually see science teachers; he would never see other teachers in other departments. (HoS)

The instructional monitoring practices were found to be widely known and understood by all the participants. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the process:



*Figure 4.1: School A formal observation process*

Although the respondents appeared to recognise lesson observation as a normal feature of their profession, there were some criticisms about the way it was conducted:

It can be very misleading when you give your comment every five minutes of the lesson, which is fine for me but again she misses some of the most important things in the observation when you are too detailed. (ST1)

Nonetheless, all the participants found the feedback sessions useful. Despite this perceived benefit, there was little evidence

informing department-wide sharing of practice with ST2, for example, sharing her lesson plans with the HoD only. The HoD's plans for peer observation were not successful enough due to a shortage of two teachers and one who left. Views about visiting the HoD's lessons were not welcome because the teachers would not recognise their HoD as a role model; 'Some of my students told me that she's the [word withheld] English teacher they've ever had' (ST1); 'She invited us and then a few teachers went in ... [later on they said] there's not much you can learn' (ST3).

Despite these articulations, there was some evidence of systemic CPD embedded into what emerged to be a cycle of training sessions organised fortnightly on Tuesdays. The only meeting this researcher was able to attend had as its focus timetable allocations for the following academic year. However, all the respondents mentioned ICT training, and the HoD spoke of training she had provided for her department. Externally, the teachers would opt for training provided by CIE.

#### Leadership involvement

Although not explicit, the staff handbook recognises that school leadership opportunities can be extended to those beyond formal roles. This is evident in some of the job descriptions in the staff handbook (see table 4.7).

1	Teacher: job description
2	HoD: job description
3	Form tutor: job description
4	Year leader: job description

*Table 4.7: School A job descriptions*

Middle leadership has been a manifestation of wider school leadership. However, its remit entails boundaries. The HoD implied that, due to her broadened role boundary, she was allowed to attend SMT meetings; a right she would not enjoy if her role had remained confined to the HoD:

Quite a lot; when we have [SMT] meetings every week ... but if I were just the head of faculty, no I wouldn't be privy to those meetings.

The job descriptions concerning form tutors and year leaders (see table 4.7) are strong indications of a wider leadership role, which tends to stretch the notion of leadership beyond formal leaders to also include teachers. The HoS explained the rationale for broadening the leadership radius thus:

If we didn't fill them with someone else, they would lay on our shoulders to cover those, and we wanted to engage more people in it because we want a job done properly and we want to promote leadership.

The HoS linked the extended leadership roles to the teachers' 'own initiative to wish to do things outside their job description'. However, such opportunities were not always determined by aspiration. Occasionally, tenure and connections would be factored in; 'I have been in this school for a long time ... Every time there is a need to contact the Ministry of Education, the bosses would come to me' (ST1).

Leadership involvement, as described above, appears to be somewhat opportunistic. ST2 added that 'they do offer posts to the teachers like if you want to take a post'.

There are also some indications of leadership involvement of the teachers at the departmental level. The HoD 'hoped' that one of the teachers would 'step up and volunteer to be the assistant head of English from next year'. The term 'volunteer' was frequently repeated. After explaining an invigilation chaos, ST1 added that 'Yeah, I volunteered, you know, I'm going to look into Year 9. I know what I should do'. ST2 added:

Yes, during our meetings ... [if] she wants volunteers for each level to sort of prepare the displays, so she asks us, so we volunteer; I mean there's no forcing or anything like that.

Such comments, however, should not be assumed as a collective welcome of new roles and responsibilities; 'I'm here because I want to teach ... I just want [teaching students]' (ST3).

The HoD seems to be aware of this; 'If I ask someone to do something they are very uncomfortable about doing, they're not likely to do it well'. The HoD's understanding sounds more democratic than the language used in section 6 of the staff handbook (see table 4.2).

Establish clear expectations and constructive working relationships among staff, devolving responsibilities, delegating tasks and evaluating practice all within a framework of clearly understood professional accountability.

Despite these discrepancies, the HoD's actual practice resembled the mandate in the document. According to ST2, unless the HoD was forced by the majority, they had to follow what she said. A similar view was shared by ST3; '... but usually at the end of it, it's following through what the plans are'.

ST1 would not be interested in taking on new roles because he believes that his HoD is not a good listener; 'I may disagree with a lot of things she says, [but] whenever we raise concerns she doesn't really listen to us; I feel like I can't work'. ST3 chose to place a management post against her teaching role:

Teaching is my priority, so if people give me work outside of that I will just do it because it's given to me. But to step up and say I want to be the HoD and all that, no I think I enjoy myself more in the classroom.

The HoD added that, ultimately, she had to take the final decision. The implications for the teachers are evident in the statements below which range from indifference to convenience; 'I'm used to it I suppose; I don't really mind' (ST1); 'Sometimes I think it's easier rather than to ask everyone about it, and everybody has different ideas' (ST2); 'I guess you don't have to argue so much about things because you know she's not going to listen to you' (ST3).

Consequently, all the respondents sounded cautious about implementing their decisions without informing their superiors. Although the HoS assessed the HoD's autonomy as 'quite high', and she knew the senior managers trusted her, she stressed that she would still consult the HoS and/or the principal in order not to 'create problems ... or [for] any major logistical challenges', adding that she had to be 'answerable' for the results of her decisions. She also added that it would not be sensible to discuss an idea in the department to later 'find out that I'm not allowed to do it'. Although all the teachers perceived their HoD as having been given sufficient autonomy, ST1 chose to put it this way:

There are things in the school that you can't decide on your own as the HoD, especially when it's about policies, placement of students in class ... because that later on will involve parents.

The teachers spoke in similar terms about informing their superiors. While ST2 spoke of the need to 'standardise everything', ST1 saw this as against their culture; 'It is not our culture to do that here. We will definitely not do something without the knowledge of the HoD'. ST3 made distinctions between serious and less serious matters:

Usually the type of work she gives us is like things that really don't need much [of a] decision; so it's not like any serious business, so it has a lot to do with students. I think as far as the students are concerned, she trusts us.

Further distinctions were made throughout the interview. For example, the HoD spoke of the display boards as a matter for which she and staff could have their say. This is what ST2 had to say:

Only if it is a very drastic change ... she [the HoD] still has to ask the principal ... it depends how serious or how much it concerns the parents or the whole school.

Considering all these matters, the respondents expressed mixed reactions about their school's leadership. Both the HoD and ST1 praised the principal and the HoS for being 'very good at listening' and 'approachable'. Comparing School A with other private schools, ST3 was satisfied with the 'benefits' she received. ST2 sounded less congratulatory as she thought the management only took the expatriates' views into consideration. In comparison, these teachers were less satisfied with the manner in which their department was led. While the HoD sounded reasonable in

defending her leadership performance, she turned out to have been aware of some stumbling blocks for quite some time; 'There are a couple of older far more experienced senior members of the team who, when I arrived, I was forewarned might give me a rough ride'. The HoS, who chose to differentiate between management and leadership, assessed her performance on the former as 'quite well' and 'extremely well' on the latter.

Despite these mixed responses, the HoD believes that she is an effective leader. While ST1 expressed a similar view, ST2 said that she felt frustrated, and she would feel otherwise if she was given more freedom. ST3 appeared to be differentiating her role within the classroom as opposed to department. Within the former, she said she felt effective whereas, within the latter, she was unable to situate herself.

### **Maths Department**

School A has a large maths department with nine Malaysian teachers. The experience of the respondents averages about 12 years, although not necessarily in international schools. The HoD has been in this school for three years. Although he is not Malaysian, he comes from the same region. This is his third international school, but experiencing his first leadership role with a teaching workload of about 11 hours a week.

The HoD and three teachers were invited to participate in separate interviews which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. The researcher also made observations of the professional interactions between these informants and their colleagues in the maths department. Observations were extended to the only departmental meeting held during the course of this study. Where



appropriate, pertinent sections of the staff handbook were consulted.

### Roles

The maths HoD described his role in traditional terms as a 'messenger' and a 'spokesperson':

I'm just like a messenger from the senior manager. So I'm just the spokesperson for maths ... or the other way round I can convey what we think as a department to the senior management; so I'm a middle person.

This is consistent with the view the HoS holds for the HoD position:

[It is] sort of go-between for senior leadership and teachers in some ways ... to help facilitate the school moving forward with some direction from their senior leaders.

Most teachers held similar views but ST3 looked at the HoD's role from a different perspective:

He is the one who is supposed to fight for us, and also plan for the year, and we also help him in the planning and he should discuss what he's going to do with us and get our opinion about it.

ST2 attached great importance to the HoD role and emphasised that he is someone who 'understands the subject' as 'he's the one accountable' for that department, a belief shared by the HoS in that, without them, he was not sure how he would operate.

### Responsibilities

The staff handbook spells out the HoD's responsibilities in great detail (see table 4.2). However, the HoD was unaware of such a document; 'There isn't [one] for head of department', and he relies instead on his 'common sense' to manage the department. His understanding of his responsibilities involved 'making sure the students are taught rightly, and the scheme of work has been followed by all the teachers'. To this diluted job description, he also added addressing any possible complaints from the parents. However, the teachers knew that such a document existed but they would all hardly ever refer to it for guidance.

### Role relationships

The HoD spoke in favourable terms about his relationship with the SMT:

Very good; I just go into the room and discuss with them. There are no barriers or pressures to keep quiet. I just voice out and I think they are good at listening to our opinions.

This perspective was reciprocated by the HoS as he claimed he enjoyed a 'strong' relationship with the HoDs, and tended to interact with them 'very regularly'. This, however, contrasted with this researcher's observations. Recalling the split block system, the HoS was seen only once in the staffroom. He explained that his visits exceeded those of the previous HoS: 'I always go to find people in the staffroom. I don't tend to phone them up and get them to come here. I try to find them'. He denied that this was a conscious effort:

I've got a lot of work to do, and I feel my base is here. People know that they can find me in here and not the staffroom, and also it's a little bit of their space rather than my space really. They probably want to maybe talk about me, school policy, if I was there, they certainly wouldn't do it.

Based on observations, 99% of the interactions in the staffroom were in the local vernacular, albeit in an international school. The staff handbook has no specific focus on the HoS's job description.

The HoD also spoke positively about his relationship with the teachers but some faint strands of tension could be discerned in some remarks:

I would say in a very professional way but some of them I find quite pushy in a sense that, when I say let's do this, then someone has a suggestion to do something else. (HoD)

I would say 'good'. I tell him what I want to tell him so it's up to him. I do argue with him; I do disagree with him sometimes, but he takes my opinion. We have a healthy argument, but then we are still friends. (ST3)

One of the major complaints about the HoD concerned his perceived unwillingness to listen to his department members. This issue was raised by ST2 and ST3; '[If I were him] I would listen to my staff ... he's very dominant' (ST2); 'The only part is he doesn't listen so much to the teachers' (ST3). This perceived weakness aside, all the teachers stressed that their HoD was knowledgeable in the subject matter.

### Instructional engagement

Similar monitoring procedures to those in English were in place for the maths department (see figure 4.1). However, the HoD was

also perceived to be an arbiter when parents complained about a teacher's practice. Under section 5 (see table 4.2) – relations with parents – there are three bullet points, none of which makes a direct reference to the parents' complaints. The closest item is thus:

Establish a partnership with parents to involve them in their child's learning, as well as providing information about curriculum, attainment, progress and targets.

The term 'parents' was used on a number of occasions by the participants. The HoS said; 'I think local staff can at times feel a little threatened by parents. It's a cultural as well as a historical thing'.

The evidence from the maths teachers helped cast some light on the role of lesson observations. While all the teachers found their feedback sessions useful, ST1 related formal lesson observations to contracts rather than pedagogical improvement. ST2 expressed her discomfort for being observed. She also linked the appraisal mechanism to the financial bonus system, and tried to downplay its value; 'Not much difference for me; as long as you do your work ... no complaints from the parents ... observation is just to follow the procedures'. A similar view was expressed by ST3.

There were some conflicting reports about peer observation. The HoD claimed he had permitted his staff to decide if and when they wished to visit a colleague's lesson. Nonetheless, ST1 found it uncomfortable for his colleagues, and ST2 claimed she had received no instructions from her boss. Although ST3 mentioned simultaneous class times as a barrier, she added that she had visitors to her class which she had reciprocated: 'It's encouraged

here ... last year it was more; this year we didn't have much focus on that'. Despite limited opportunity for peer observation, all the respondents spoke of two-day face-to-face training sessions organised by the CIE and fully sponsored by the school.

These discrepancies raise questions about communication across the department. Based on observations, the maths department was the most interactive of the three. More teachers would return to their department. The HoD had based himself there. In the only departmental meeting that this researcher was able to attend, only six teachers attended; some of them had not been seen in the staffroom before then. This attendance rate contradicts section 5 of the teachers' job description (see table 4.7) where all staff are expected to 'participate in meetings'.

#### Leadership involvement

The HoS made a distinction between the time when leadership positions were 'suggested to certain people', compared to the current practice where they are 'open to the whole staff'. Considering this, there are strong indications of school leadership involvement in the maths department. Apart from the HoD, ST1 is in charge of the examinations. He prepares the IGCSE timetable for the CIE examinations. He was never seen in the staffroom during this researcher's visit; due to the nature of his work, he was based in a room in the primary block. ST2 has been in charge of statistics for the sports day. In addition to being a homeroom teacher, ST3 has responsibilities for timetabling. She serves on a committee to manage the daily relief teachers, and to plan for class allocations for the new academic year. Thus, roles in the maths department are offered based on experience, for example

ST1 with his vast experience of serving as exam secretary; or expertise, for example ST2 who was appropriately selected to serve on the sports day committee; or friendship:

Another teacher in the maths department asked me whether I wanted to join or not ... she knows we get along; we have worked together before. (ST3)

There is limited evidence of leadership involvement in the department. ST2, for example, acted as the assistant HoD. She explained her appointment thus: 'January this year he approached me to become his assistant ... I said no at the beginning but he said he would help me ... I just took it'. The only thing that ST3 could mention was a celebration evening in which the maths teachers were given a role to play. The HoD explains the limited opportunity for leadership roles in the maths department; 'If I make a wrong decision, I'll be answerable'. The HoD's conservatism became even more evident when, to reach the principal, he would first contact the English HoD in her capacity as the assistant HoS:

I think as a professional there should be a proper channel. For example, if my teachers wanted to implement or suggest something, I think they ought to let me know first ... at least I'm aware. I think if you jump the channel, it's not very respectful.

The comment by his assistant, ST2, corroborated this; 'He wants to be in charge of the whole department, so whatever the decision, I need to liaise with him first'.

This may explain why the HoS rated the maths HoD's autonomy as 'medium'. The interview data suggest a trend in the maths department that tends to distinguish between serious and less

serious matters. For example, he described a decision about missed exams as 'a very small issue' while he had this to say about the matters he perceived as more serious:

If it involves any parents; it depends on the subject matter itself. If it affects the school, then I think [the principal] has to be aware. If it affects just the department, I can decide. (HoD)

A similar view was held by ST3 about teacher-led initiatives, which were 'for simple, simple things like directly dealing with students'.

Despite these complications, most of the respondents were satisfied with the school's leadership, except for ST2, who sounded critical of the HoS:

The head of secondary is very new to the school and he's a bit loose – gives too much freedom to teachers until we don't know sometimes what is happening; what is the direction of the school.

As for the leadership of the department, the HoD defended his leadership style as he saw himself 'the one responsible'. While ST1 expressed his complete satisfaction, perhaps because of his distance from the department, ST2 and ST3 had learnt to get along with their HoD; 'I think as assistant to him, I would say I'll support him, and in terms of his leadership style so far I can adapt to his leadership style' (ST2). 'I think it's good, compared to other departments, generally I'm happy ... it's just more tolerance and listening' (ST3). The HoS distinguished between management and leadership. He assessed the former as 'extremely well' and the latter as 'reasonably well'.

On the whole, the maths HoD evaluated his practice as effective. In contrast, the teachers' perceptions of their individual performance were mixed. While ST1 thought his performance was moderately effective, ST3 assessed hers as effective. She explained it thus; 'I'm OK with whatever they do; I don't mind because I feel they are better than what we had before in the previous schools I've been to'. ST2's assessment of her performance inclined towards frustration, and she chose to link it to her concerns beyond the department:

[It is] frustration. For me, he [HoS] does not actually take care of the staff welfare, not in terms of salary, [but] the culture – his relationship with the teachers. I think [they are] more to the expatriates and not to the local teachers; that's the big bias ... I think he [the principal] more handles the parents, not the teachers.

### **Science Department**

School A has a large science department with ten Malaysian teachers. The average experience of the respondents amounts to 14 years, although not necessarily in international schools. The HoD is Malaysian and has been in this school for five years. He was initially recruited as a teacher, but was promoted to replace the current HoS. He is serving his first year as HoD at his third international school. He has a teaching workload of about 13 hours a week.

The HoD and three teachers consented to participate in separate interviews between 45 minutes and one hour. The professional interactions among these respondents, and those with their colleagues, were observed in the science department. Similar observations were carried out in the only departmental meeting



held in the course of this study. The pertinent sections in the staff handbook were also consulted.

### Roles

The participants' definitions and understanding of the science HoD's role varied greatly. The HoD chose to interpret his role along instructional lines:

As the HoD, the most important responsibility is to take care of your teachers in terms of academic performance, and the students' learning.

The views of two of the teachers converged on leadership, but diverged in understanding:

I think the head of department should provide leadership, but my present HoD is not providing leadership; he's not sure about a lot of things. We just drift along ... and sometimes there's a breakdown in communication. (ST1)

[He should] lead us. Like google drive; using google drive and gather information inside the google drive, and he manages to arrange all the data in google sheets. (ST3)

While ST1 is critical of the leadership role, ST3's view concerns the HoD's managerial role. ST2's understanding, however, links her HoD's role to the support he should provide; 'Very simple! To me, the HoD should support us. For example, I like exploring new things, so if I make mistakes, you should support me' (ST2).

The role of the HoD is clearly stipulated in the staff handbook. For example, the objective under section 1 of the HoD's job description (see table 4.2), supports the HoD's view; 'Set expectations and targets for teachers and students in relation to standards of student achievement and the quality of teaching'.

In addition to being 'an inspirational leader', the staff handbook expects the HoD to 'create a cohesive and dynamic department, with a shared purpose to achieve at the highest levels'. This expectation links to ST1's concern about her HoD's lack of leadership. The closest element to ST2's understanding is perhaps the competency desired under 'student achievement':

Use data effectively to identify students who are underachieving and, where necessary, create and implement effective plans of action to support those students.

The only item that relates to supporting teachers appears under 'managing performance' and is articulated thus:

Ensure that new teachers are appropriately monitored, supported and assessed in relation to defined professional standards and requirements of the school's job description.

What the respondents' role conceptions suggest, in contrast to the staff handbook, is a selective and fragmentary understanding of the role.

### Responsibilities

The HoD's responsibilities are delineated on three pages in the staff handbook under seven sections (see table 4.2). The HoD's interpretation of his responsibilities is narrow in scope but perhaps of great importance in the eyes of the senior management:

Normally the management will let me know if they have any student affairs matters, any complaints from parents, so I have to check with the teachers and I have to give them [SMT] a report.

### Role relationships

The science HoD used to be a teacher when it was led by the current HoS. The HoS admitted that the current HoD was not his preferred candidate, but he was left with no choice at that time. The incumbent described his interactions with the HoS as 'minimum'. The HoS emphasised that he paid special attention to the science department:

Yeah definitely! So I've got a better idea of what's going on in the science department. In some ways I'm a little bit more critical than other departments.

This attitude may account for the uneasy relationship between the HoD and the HoS.

Based on observations, slightly fewer than half of the science teachers would return to their table in the staffroom with the rest staying in the labs. The HoD's table talks involved interacting with a small group at one end of the table while ignoring the rest. ST1 explained her relationship with the HoD as 'respectful at arm's length'. A formal climate of perceived professionalism can also be discerned in ST2's description; 'I talk to him when I need to ask him something. It's like professional work'. These remarks were similar to the view the HoD held of his relationship. Speaking of four teachers involved in a Year 8 science project, he described his relationship with them as 'professional', and justified his selective interactions thus:

Year 8, there are four teachers. Two of them, to me, are not doing a good job; but another teacher and I are putting in some effort; so I will discuss with this teacher.

The departmental climate, as described by these respondents, contrasts with the expectations in the staff handbook, first in terms of holding the staff to account (section 6, see table 4.2), and, second, in terms of creating a healthy professional environment:

Establish clear expectations and constructive working relationships among staff ... all within a framework of clearly understood professional accountability.

Create a climate which enables other teachers to develop and maintain positive attitudes and confidence in their teaching.

Contrary to these remarks, ST3 described his relationship with the HoD in terms of friendship; 'We are close friends. Sometimes, when he wants to talk, he comes to me'.

This researcher was able to attend a departmental meeting whose focus included training on assessment. During some pair-work activities, it was observed that the HoD would only join ST3 at his desk and interact with him. As a close friend, ST3 had this to share about his HoD's behaviour; 'I think he's got this attitude. When he doesn't like certain things, he will not engage with them'.

The quality of the departmental climate had an impact on the extent to which the respondents approached their HoD for guidance. The friendliest stance was expressed by ST3; 'First [name withheld]; it's easy to approach. I search for him and find him'. Considering the HoD's perceived heavy workload, the fairest response was offered by ST2; 'Usually I choose my colleagues because I know that my HoD is also busy. Unless for confirmation,

then I'll ask him'. The least conciliatory position was adopted by ST1; however, with a twist in her interpretation of the role:

Definitely no; the role of HoD is management. He is supposed to manage people not the knowledge. The teachers themselves should have the knowledge and skills.

There were discrepancies in the assessment of the HoD's knowledge of the subject matter. While the HoD saw himself as 'expert', and ST3 agreed, some of the participants did not agree; 'They [the students] complain to me about [subject withheld]. They wish who and who is the teacher and not this teacher' (ST1). The remarks in this sub-section indicate that there are several aspects with discrepancies, and few areas where all the participants are in full agreement.

#### Instructional engagement

Monitoring of teaching and learning is a standardised practice at School A (see figure 4.1). Informal drop-ins also take place throughout the academic year.

ST1 sounded critical of the formal observations for two main reasons; showcase lessons and the inadequacy of one-lesson observations:

I do not agree with this because there are some teachers who prepare one lesson for the observation. I think that every lesson you should be able to observe, and the head should actually observe more lessons to get an overall view. It's not really fair.

The HoD regarded preparing showcase lessons as a common practice at School A and 'everywhere'; 'Some teachers know that, when I'm coming, they will put up a show'. He linked this to

teachers' efforts to collect better marks for the appraisal. He also pointed out other methods of monitoring such as 'learning walks', checking exercise books, students' results, and lesson plans. All these means are explicitly authorised and endorsed in the staff handbook, under section 3 (see table 4.2).

As part of CPD, a departmental programme takes place which is known as 'teaching and learning sessions'. These meet every two or three weeks. In the only meeting that this researcher was able to attend, some time was allocated to training teachers about assessing a piece of work against a set of rubrics provided. Training of this kind is endorsed in the staff handbook under 'teaching and learning'; 'Guidance is provided on the choice of appropriate teaching and learning methods to meet the needs of the subjects and of different students'. In addition to this, the interview data indicate that peer observation is hardly practised in the science department mainly due to reported time constraints.

#### Leadership involvement

There were some mentions of whole-school involvement, but these tended to denote temporary tasks, such as accompanying students on trips to Japan (e.g. ST3) or for competitions to the US (e.g. ST2). Last year, the HoD served on a committee whose main duty involved drawing up behavioural policies for the students. He reflected on his involvement as follows; 'We were asked who would be interested and I said I was. It's up to you if you want to be involved or not'. Contrary to the HoD's willingness, both ST1 and ST2 declined to assume new roles, as their passion involved working with children, and they had family obligations; 'I enjoy

teaching a lot and if I become a manager I will have to reduce my teaching load' (ST1); 'Because I think I should be more focused on my family. Last time this school was like my second home. I spent all the time here' (ST2).

The strongest proof of leadership involvement at the department level came from ST3, who is also the assistant HoD:

He chose me last year. Actually I was shocked. There are more experienced teachers. At first I refused, but he insisted on choosing me because ... maybe he cannot cope with [others] ... it's just a title ... most things are done by himself.

This comment suggests that roles are shared by virtue of invitations and on terms of friendship.

Contrary to the HoD's claim that he tended to consult the teachers to learn about their needs, ST1 was strongly critical of his approach:

I don't think that I need to bring anything up to him because it won't be well received. He may see me as a threat ... so I'll just keep a low profile.

Based on the HoD's statements, his remit hardly goes beyond that of an agent as he 'doesn't have full authority on certain issues'. He spoke of 'certain procedures' for obtaining approvals. This may explain why the HoS chose to grade his autonomy as 'low', the least of all the HoDs.

This matter brings to the fore the distinctions respondents tend to make between serious and less serious matters. For example, regarding teaching and learning, the HoD claimed that teachers

had sufficient freedom of action – not too much, though, as they had to follow the syllabi. The example ST1 provided involved ‘planning the Year 8 science trip’, adding that she felt it was ‘out of respect’ to share the plan with her HoD. Similarly, ST2 spoke of a science project and ST3 saw it as necessary to consult with the senior teachers.

Despite these restrictions and reservations, most of the respondents were satisfied with the leadership of the school, except for the HoD who insisted on the necessity to further promote leadership values. There was less satisfaction with the leadership of the department. While the HoD emphasised the importance of leadership values among the department members, ST1 accused him of lacking leadership. Even ST3, the HoD’s assistant and, ‘ally’, chose to grade his leadership 5-6 on a scale of 10. The HoS made a distinction between leadership and management. While he rated the HoD’s management ‘extremely well’, he assessed his leadership as ‘average’.

Considering these perspectives, the HoD saw himself an effective leader within the department, but slightly frustrated at the school level. A similar view was expressed by ST1; ‘Within the classroom I feel effective but within the school maybe not because there are some things that we still have to go by’. Other participants expressed satisfaction with School A’s reasonable workload and little interference in their work.

## **Overview**

School A has a specific document that clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the HoDs. Although there is an expectation of uniform understanding, interpretations vary within, as well as



across, all the departments. These are normally selective, fragmentary and interpretative. While there are limited indications of leadership, more of the participants continue to view the role through the managerial lens. More often than not, the HoDs' responsibilities are understood in pragmatic terms. This involves diluting and pinning down the role to a specific aspect. It is understanding the HoD role in its different 'aspects' that renders it selective, fragmentary and interpretative. These aspects consist of parents, e.g. for the SMT, rubrics e.g. for the English HoD, 'fighter', e.g. for a maths teacher, protector e.g. for a science teacher, among others.

Incoherent understanding of the HoDs' roles and responsibilities has impacted on the role relationships in the departments. Broadly speaking, complaints can be divided into two categories; subject knowledge and attitude. While there are some concerns over the HoDs' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, there are far more complaints about the HoDs' work attitude than their subject expertise.

Arguably, the most powerful feature of School A lies in its monitoring of teaching and learning. It is uniformly understood by the participants and routinely exercised by all the HoDs. This understanding is in agreement with the view provided above in that instruction (subject knowledge) is taken more seriously than behaviour (attitude). The staff handbook contains several detailed sections that clearly articulate the instructional expectations and performance indicators. This contrasts with the absence of a distinct document on professional behaviour.

Leadership involvement was examined at two levels; school and department, the extent of which varies from department to department, and from person to person. Interview data inform several categories pertinent to leadership involvement (see table 4.8).

Leadership involvement	
1	role vs. task
2	serious vs. less serious
3	outside classroom vs. inside classroom
4	interest vs. disinterest

Table 4.8: Leadership involvement dichotomies

According to Table 4.8, assuming a role could facilitate exercising leadership, this is officially recognised and linked to job descriptions, e.g. HoD, year leader, etc. Another way to enable the exercise of leadership involves taking on tasks; these are informal duties that could be short- or long-term, one-off or routine, or a combination of these. For example, requesting the English ST1 to deal with the Ministry of Education could be considered as a one-off task, as well as a short-term one. A long-term, routine task would involve managing the relief teachers. The major difference between role and task lies in the extent to which they permit the exercise of leadership. A role incumbent is in a more ‘favourable’ condition to exercise leadership, an opportunity not readily available to a task performer. The available data indicate that the scope for leadership is far less than for management, the benchmark being the degree of autonomy. All the participants admitted, in one way or another, that they would share their decisions with the authorised administrators before implementation. The two key reasons provided were accountability and culture. On the contrary, once the remit falls

within the realm of teaching and learning, the level of confidence increases, for both the HoDs and the teachers. In other words, the perceived degree of autonomy incrementally diminishes from the classroom, to the department, to the whole school. Accordingly, the balance between leadership and management shifts in favour of the latter, hinting at the impact of autonomy on the leadership/management equilibrium.

The second row in Table 4.8 points to the serious/less serious divide. Indications show that three elements inform the extent to which a matter is considered serious or otherwise; task (what), place (where) and people (who). If a task should take place outside the classroom, and involves parents, it should then be a serious matter, as alluded to by the English ST2 and the maths HoD, for example. On the contrary, if a task should occur inside the classroom, which involves students, it should then be a less serious matter, e.g. display boards, trips, competitions, etc. It is precisely for this latter category that the level of leadership interest appears to be high. Evidence shows that teachers tend to differentiate between classroom-related tasks as compared to non-classroom tasks (see Rows 3 & 4, table 4.9). The evidence implies that there is a great deal of interest for leadership, if and when a task or a role involves working with students. On a related note, the evidence points to the manner in which tasks and/or roles are offered to the participants. This ranges from tenure to experience, connections, expertise, competency, invitation and friendship.

In general, there is greater satisfaction with the school's leadership compared to that of the department. The reasons

provided are the antithesis of those of the departments, i.e. attitude. At the department level, the extent of leadership satisfaction is contingent upon the inside-/outside-classroom phenomenon. Some teachers feel effective within the classroom, and less so outside, mainly due to the greater possibility of conflicting work attitudes. This serves to render loose the connection between leadership *involvement* and level of perceived work satisfaction. In other words, the criterion to determine satisfaction with leadership at the level of school, section or classroom is dependent on the anticipated quality of *attitude*, and not *engagement* per se.

The evidence suggests that departments operate within varied models. Metaphorically speaking, the English department follows an 'island' model, a fragmented department with limited common ground. The science department follows a 'solar system' model, with a few teachers closer to the HoD, and more of them further away. The maths department follows a 'magnet' model, with the HoD attracting a select group of teachers, and repelling the rest. In short, the English, maths and science departments in School A have their strength in managing instruction – the traditional function of schools. The area in need of attention is arguably the leadership aspect.

## **Chapter Five: Case Study Report School B**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the second case study, hereafter referred to as School B. School B is an international school located in Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory. It offers the British Curriculum, culminating in the IGCSE. It has a mixed student population of about 500 with 32 teachers in both primary and secondary sections. Out of this number, only six teachers are not Malaysian. The school has a September-June academic calendar.

The school is led by a principal who superintends the primary and the secondary sections. In the secondary campus, she is assisted by several HoDs including, but not limited to, English, maths and science. She has been in post for nearly five years, and she is not Malaysian.

### **Methods**

This study explored middle leadership through five main themes; roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement. Semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis were used across all the themes. Observation was employed to evaluate the nature of the participants' interactions in the staffroom and staff meetings (see table 4.1). The next section discusses the findings from the English department.

### **English Department**

The English department is the most ethnically diverse. The HoD has been in this school for four years. This is his first experience

in an international school, and of leadership, in Malaysia. His teaching workload is 10.5 hours a week. He is not Malaysian. The teachers come from different nationalities with different work experiences.

At the beginning of the field work, the HoD was absent due to ill health. The study began with the teachers who agreed to participate in separate interviews. Upon his return, the HoD also agreed. Observations were conducted in the staffroom. Departmental meetings are not very common at this school; therefore, the staff meetings provided the only opportunity for observation. Pertinent sections of documents were also consulted.

### Roles

There are several documents in School B. Of these, 'school rules & regulations', with a template similar to a contract, was scrutinised. Table 5.1 shows its sections.

Sections	Focus
1	Working hours
2	Duties
3	Dress code
4	Physical appearance
5	Teaching
6	Record of work
7	Evaluation of students' work
8	Leave entitlement
9	Medical leave
10	Termination from service

*Table 5.1: School B rules & regulations*

Section 2 makes a direct reference to the HoD position:

Teachers with relevant expertise in a particular subject may be appointed as subject head to oversee matters related to the various subjects.

Given this, the English HoD denied that he held such a position; 'I have to confess I really don't know'. He explained his uncertainty thus:

Initially I was supposed to be the A-level coordinator, but the person who was the English HoD left, and it just slid over to me. It was never defined to me; it was just a given title. I have no job description. I have no idea what the role involves.

No specific job description for the HoDs could be located in the documents. Moreover, the teachers' statements validated the HoD's claims. While ST2 remarked that her HoD was not known to her, ST1 spoke of the impact this has had on her teaching; 'To be honest, I don't have any guidance on where to start, and what syllabus I need to use for my students'.

ST3 complained about her HoD's attitude; 'He did not delegate any work to me or tell me what to do – just gave me the books'. She then made similar comments to those of ST1; 'No one came and told me this is what you should do; this is how you should teach – no one!' (ST3).

After four years, the HoD still considers himself 'a subject teacher'. These perceptions were not always viewed in a negative light. ST3 revealed how this perceived 'vacuum' had benefited her:

I like the school because no one comes and tells me what to do. I can do whatever I want. There is freedom in this school.

These perceptions reflect the consequences of a role left unattended, undefined and unchallenged.

### Responsibilities

The HoD revealed that he was assigned two additional roles. First, he provided advice to Year 10 and 11 candidates on their IGCSE options and examinations. Second, he was involved in recruiting new teachers: 'I interview candidates for recruitment. I do the teaching assessment, and they have to do a teaching demonstration'. The principal further expanded the process thus:

The new teachers will do an interview with [name withheld], [with] a 15 to 20 minute lesson demonstration, and usually I'll be there. If the evaluation is OK, then I will sit with the new teachers and discuss matters.

### Role relationships

A lack of clarity in the HoD's role has affected the participants' relationships. The HoD spoke of his complete isolation from the senior meetings due to the 'principal's choice':

I don't have a relationship with the principal. I don't attend any meetings with the principal. I've never been asked to go.

During this study, two senior meetings took place between the principal and the maths and science HoDs. The English HoD was away due to ill health, which makes it difficult to verify his claims by observation. Nonetheless, ST2 was also unhappy about her HoD's attitude:

My relationship with him is totally negative because, when I first came in, I felt that [name withheld] was a very negative person. He complains about the management; he complains about everything. Whenever I see him, it's always the negativity.



When asked, the principal claimed that teachers would turn to their HoDs if they had concerns. However, the interview data show that the circumstances in the English department had forced the teachers to rely on two sources for support; colleagues and themselves:

I'm very fortunate I have another English teacher, so I usually ask her for guidance. (ST1)

I go to no one. They don't know what I'm teaching. They don't know anything about the IGCSE English. She [the principal] is not a teacher; she doesn't know anything about the IGCSE. (ST3)

While the claim may be true about the principal's ignorance of the IGCSE English, some of the participants alluded to her teaching career in the sciences.

The principal spoke favourably about her HoDs, and did not make any negative comments about the English HoD. On the whole, the participants described their relationships with the principal as 'very good' (ST2), and with 'no conflict' (ST1). ST3 described her relationship as 'good'; however, this assessment was provided in our interview prior to an incident that, as subsequent observations revealed, soured their relationship thereafter. In the second staff meeting, ST3 criticised the principal for ignoring the basic needs of a teacher:

I don't have a marker pen to even write. I don't have a duster. No one provided me. I use my hand to erase the board, and I use my own marker pens.

This perceived negligence turned out to have been the case with the new teachers only, as it was corroborated by another across the room. Issues about inexpensive stationery were raised despite

the fact that the same teacher, i.e. ST3, had revealed earlier to this researcher that she had spent around £80 of her own money on supplementary books which were not provided either. This could suggest spillovers for the staff meeting of an unsettled English department.

### Instructional engagement

In the 'school rules & regulations' (see table 5.1), there are three sections about teaching and learning, i.e. 5, 6 and 7. The terms in section 5 appear to correspond most closely to monitoring teaching and learning:

5.1 Teachers are expected to carry out their teaching, educating duties, tasks, diligently to their best level of ability at all times.

5.2 The management expects innovative, effective, and constructive teaching strategies and approaches from all teachers.

5.3 Teachers should utilise the teaching aids and resources effectively.

5.4 Where necessary, the teachers should take the initiative to create their own teaching materials for the benefit of the students.

5.5 Where a purchase is needed, prior approval must be obtained from the principal.

5.6 All teachers must strictly adhere to the IGCSE syllabus requirements.

These terms do not employ explicit language to discuss monitoring teaching and learning. This perceived ambiguity has caused confusion. The HoD said that he carried out lesson observations 'twice a term' as 'part of the official assessment' with the dates 'on the timetable'. However, ST2 said that she had learnt about it

through 'a conversation in the staffroom', and that class visits were unannounced.

When asked about the observation criteria, the HoD said that 'it was kept secret', a claim that ST1 agreed with, and added that she relied on ideas she had 'in mind' from the time she worked in [country withheld]. Although ST3 knew about the lesson observations, her description of the process was insufficient. This confusion is understandable due to their HoD's sick leave.

While casting doubt on the teaching qualifications of 'a fair number of teachers', the HoD was in denial that such monitoring practices were linked to improving teaching and learning; 'I think the sole criterion for this assessment is salary. It's not for the purpose of improving teaching and learning'.

This was confirmed at two staff meetings attended by the researcher. In the first one, after having discussed several matters, the principal added:

... and these things affect your evaluation. We will ask the students about the teachers' performance or maybe attitude. This is our duty; our job.

The last two lines are indicative of a parallel monitoring system, i.e. students' feedback. This perceived emphasis on quality of instruction contrasts with the high degree of absenteeism. On one occasion, seven teachers in both primary and secondary sections were absent, leaving students unattended. This contradicts what the school document mandates under sections 2, 8 and 10:

Teachers shall replace colleagues who are absent. Such relief teachers are expected to carry out the necessary activities planned for the relevant period. (Item 2.2)

Any more leave/MCs taken than the allocated amount [i.e. 9 days p.a.], there will be a salary deduction for that. (Item 8.5)

Termination from service ... being absent from work too often without acceptable reason. (Item 10.1)

It was observed that the students were left on their own while several teachers were in the staffroom. The maths HoD explained why the principal refused to act on items 8.5 and 10.1 above:

A maths teacher was absent for three days. I prepared the first warning letter as she [the principal] asked me to do it, but the principal didn't talk to her because she's scared she's going to leave; you know, she is always afraid of losing the teachers.

Observations suggest that, not only is teacher absenteeism common, it is implicitly encouraged. This is what the principal had to say in the second staff meeting:

Please teachers if you need to apply for your leave, do it three days in advance. Again I ask you not to forget preparing worksheets. [Name withheld] will arrange the shelves in the primary building for worksheets in a box file.

And the only reason she would not place the box files in the secondary building was the shortage of space. This researcher examined the minutes from as early as September 2012 until May 2015, all signed by the science HoD, as he was also in charge of student affairs and filing. Table 5.2 displays the section headings:

Section	Focus
1	Speech by principal
2	Previous minutes
3	Raised issues
4	Administrative management

*Table 5.2: School B minutes section headings*

In a record dated 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, under section 4, there are three reminders about teachers' professional ethics which are directly linked to teaching and learning; punctuality, submission of medical certificates, and emergency leave. It is on this same page that the principal, under section 1, announces cases of parental complaints: 'Teachers have to plan teaching properly as some parents complained about homework given'. The examination of the rest of this document exposes School B's extremely limited focus on monitoring teaching and learning.

#### Leadership involvement

There is some evidence of broad-based leadership involvement. At the school level, section 2 of 'school rules & regulations' (see table 5.1), discusses a role known as 'teacher on duty (TOD)':

TODs are to supervise the students during morning assemblies, tea and lunch breaks, as well as at the end of the school day. It is the duty of the TOD to record the events of the day on a daily basis.

Observations exposed other leadership opportunities such as student affairs and disciplinary committee. The minutes of the staff meetings allude to sports committee members, house teachers (2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015), school carnival committee members (5<sup>th</sup> February 2015), and class teachers (18<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

The English HoD already plays a role beyond his department, i.e. recruiting new teachers and consulting senior students. He is also 'the examination officer for the Cambridge [International Examinations]', and he is responsible for 'giving references for students'. This accumulation of roles in one person sounds somewhat opportunistic, and contrasts with the 'slim' leadership opportunities for the teachers. ST1 limited her leadership opportunity to the staff meetings when the principal asked for suggestions. ST3 expressed her interest in committing herself 'to do a lot of things', but was bemoaning the fact that she was 'isolated from everything' as 'no one really knows about [her]'. ST2 saw her passion in teaching and dealing with the students:

Actually I don't like to be part of it. I just want to focus on teaching; focus on students' matters, and I want to be involved in their lives – just to have a part to play.

She also mentioned salaries and claimed that 'teachers won't work properly [as] they work according to the salary'. None of the participants expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the decision-making process. ST3 disclosed that 'they [the SMT] changed the timetable five times' and she was not informed. This remark was repeated by several other respondents, and observed on one occasion when a student visited the staffroom to remind a teacher. This suggests that the students had access to the updated timetable, but their teachers did not.

Considering the language used in the minutes (see section 1, table 5.2), combined with the observations, it becomes clear that, with a subtle twist in wording, in School B 'all roads lead to the principal'. School B's secondary staffroom is very small with 11

desks, which are either shared or used for hot-desking. This setting forced this researcher to base himself in the library which overlooks the principal's office with two large windows. The principal's office was indeed the 'mecca' for almost anybody, e.g. the teachers, the HoDs, the accountant, the receptionist, the librarian, the students, the parents, the security guards, and the board members. The matters she was observed engaged with included, but by no means were limited to, the purchase of a stove, students' uniforms, students' discipline, attending assemblies, preparing the IGCSE examination room, reminding teachers of class time, etc. In our conversation, the principal claimed that the other day she had been in school 'until 8 o'clock in the evening'. When asked why she would not let go of some of her responsibilities, she said:

If I can find the right person, whom I can depend on 100%, of course I'll be glad to ... do you think any person would like to work more than others and take much more responsibility?

When reminded of the HoDs, she said they 'have a lot to do'. She emphatically rejected involving the teachers in leading the school:

I think the teachers should concentrate on teaching the students, improving them scientifically, improving their language. I think this is the main responsibility for the teachers.

Subsequently, she asked the researcher if he had any idea of salaries in the school. The issue of salaries was once before raised by ST2. It appears that financial constraints were a major stumbling block to widening the leadership opportunities.

Leadership evidence in the English department is relatively limited compared to the whole school. Apart from the English HoD, only ST2 served on the disciplinary committee, assisted by a colleague from the primary school. When asked why she would not involve other teachers, she said:

Because I like to work alone in everything in my life, and I like to manage everything myself. OK! Maybe you can say that I'm a perfectionist or freak, it's up to you. I've been here for such a long time, so I know the students more than the rest of the teachers. (ST2)

ST2 discussed the extent of her autonomy thus: 'There are some matters that I can take decisions myself'. She confirmed that the principal had given her this amount of authority, but was quick to dismiss any miscalculation; '... but in serious matters I need to consult [the principal]'. This understanding was also conveyed by the principal. In discussing the HoDs' scope of decision-making power, the principal chose to give examples of 'relationship with the students' as an area where they could decide on their own. However, in regard to matters such as syllabus and assessment, she refused to hold the same belief; 'No, usually we talk, especially if it's a main thing in the school, then we have to discuss, [but] if that's a little matter, no, I won't even interfere'.

The second staff meeting took place during the period of time when schools in Malaysia were closed due to a relentless haze. This led to a stormy argument between the principal and the English ST3 about the school's haze and closure policies. Amid this argument, ST3 criticised the principal for her excessive workload; '[The principal] is doing a lot of work. You are doing a lot of work. Please assign your functions to some teachers'.



The reciprocal perceptions between the HoD and the teachers were wholly negative. The HoD did not hesitate to express his anger with the school; 'I'm not happy with this school. I'm not happy with the organisation; with the way the school is organised'. Similar expressions were made by the other participants. With regards to evaluating their performance, conflicting messages emerged. For example, while the HoD thought he was effective within the classroom, he felt otherwise outside this domain. A similar distinction was communicated by ST3. ST1 was not sufficiently confident about her subject knowledge, but was sure enough of her high autonomy; 'There are no rules in this school, but I think [my autonomy] is quite high'. ST2 graded her autonomy as high as 80%.

The evidence from the English department indicates a shattered group splintered by the power of indifference (e.g. HoD), ignorance (e.g. ST1), egoism (e.g. ST2), and seclusion (e.g. ST3).

### **Maths Department**

The maths department is composed of an ethnically divided staff. The HoD is highly respected and has the longest tenure of all in the school with a teaching load of 10.5 hours a week, experiencing her first leadership role in an international setting. She is not Malaysian, but shares her nationality with the principal. Both ST1 and ST2 have extensive teaching experience, with ST3 less so.

The participants consented to attend separate interviews. Observation was used to evaluate the nature of the participants' interactions in the staffroom and staff meetings. Pertinent sections in the documents were also scrutinised.

## Roles

Section 2 in the 'school rules & regulations' deals with the position of an HoD (see table 5.1). The maths HoD was observed to spend the greatest amount of time with the principal. In the staff meetings, she would sit next to the principal, and her thoughts were occasionally sought. As ambiguous as the language in the document, the maths HoD's perception of her role seems confused:

Actually I have a lot of things to do. Sometimes I should control the classes, and I don't know the students here; they are different from students in my country. Parents pay fees so sometimes they are rude, especially with the teachers.

This selective role definition, combined with the data obtained through observations, tends to suggest a 'dislodged' role. ST1 rejects the notion that she has an HoD. ST2 describes the effect of his HoD's insufficient attention to her departmental role:

As a teacher, we need to have our schemes of work [and] our lesson plans. I believe that the head of department should be going after the teachers to get their schemes of work and lesson plans organised.

The HoD's perceived lack of attention forced the teachers to devise alternative methods to deal with their day-to-day problems. For example, ST3 would seek support from his colleagues: 'If I have something that I need to discuss, I discuss with the teachers directly'. While ST1 would behave in a similar way, she chose to make distinctions between urgent and less urgent matters; 'If that's something I have to teach immediately, then I'll go to a colleague; if not, then I would just google it'.

Despite these options, none of the participants hesitated to mention the principal as their ultimate point of contact, reintroducing the 'mecca' function of the principal. ST2 expressed these reservations about meeting his superior:

Every time I see [the principal], I see she's under so much of pressure. There are always people there talking to her. She's stressed and I feel I don't wanna give her more stress. So, when I actually get a time to see her, when she has a bit calmed down, I will explain to her my problem.

The HoD's inattention has left the maths teachers no choice but to rely on the principal as the last resort.

### Responsibilities

In the absence of a clear document articulating the HoDs' responsibilities, the teachers have taken it upon themselves to identify the priorities and devise a method to achieve them. As evident above, most of the needs of the maths teachers revolve around instruction. When asked, the maths HoD sounded aware of her responsibilities, but perhaps too overloaded by tasks to attend to them:

I do everything. I contact the parents, and solve the problems between the teachers and the parents. I check the levels of teaching, especially ... homework or extra work.

This appears to be too narrow a conception of an HoD's responsibilities, but perhaps vital for School B as it serves to provide a fresh perspective on the afore-mentioned entry in the minutes where the principal urged the teachers to be doubly careful when assigning homework; 'Teachers have to plan teaching properly as some parents complained about homework

given' (entry dated 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2014). Whatever the case, practicalities might have forced the principal to rely on her 'right-hand woman' to deal with the perceived urgent matters.

### Role relationships

All the participants expressed complete satisfaction with the principal. They praised her for her diligence and patience. ST1 likened the school environment to 'a family kind of thing', and explained that the principal was a reason she still wanted to continue working in this school.

The maths HoD spoke most favourably about her relationship with the principal. She interpreted the principal's attention to her as an indication of her competence; 'Maybe I do my job well' (HoD). Further on, she unveiled her position within the school; 'If teachers want something, they immediately come to me, and ask if they can talk to [the principal] about it'. While ST1 and ST2 sounded uninterested in discussing their relationships with the HoD, ST3 remarked thus:

She doesn't represent the maths teachers. I think she just informs the management, and the moment the management makes a decision, she is just informing back. So I feel that her position is just to transfer information. That's all.

The position of the principal was held in high regard at School B. The maths HoD had this to say about the staff members' access to her:

I think they [the teachers] cannot immediately go to the principal and talk to her. You know, as a teacher, you cannot knock on her door and immediately talk to her.

The interview and observation data, with and about the principal, suggest contradictory practices. While she remarked that teachers could first discuss their suggestions with their respective HoDs, in the staff meetings she was heard encouraging teachers to visit her in her room to discuss matters.

The most popular method of communication was via a mobile application. Again, ST2 from the science department considered this as 'informal', and preferred emails; 'Everything has to be in email, signed and printed'. The principal's positional authority emerged as deeply embedded within School B from the maths department, to science, to English. In discussing sharing practice and materials with ST1, the English ST3 would not contemplate a more systematic approach, i.e. peer observation, because of the possible risks it entailed:

I'm worried if I do it, then [the principal] would come after me to ask, 'who are you to come and do this? Why are you going to that class? You know you're a teacher; you should be teaching, you shouldn't be doing this'.

The principal's position is highly respected at School B, and this perception has affected each and every aspect of the departments.

#### Instructional engagement

Interview data helped throw new light on the monitoring processes. The data suggest that usually two observers attend a lesson. These could be a subject-specific HoD together with the principal, or at times when the principal is busy, it would involve two HoDs, one of whom is the subject expert.

The maths HoD explained that she would visit a lesson 'twice' a term for about half an hour. Contrary to what the English HoD remarked, the observational criteria were not a secret, nor were they shared with the teachers. The maths HoD explained that the existing teachers already knew about those, and the new teachers were briefed about them.

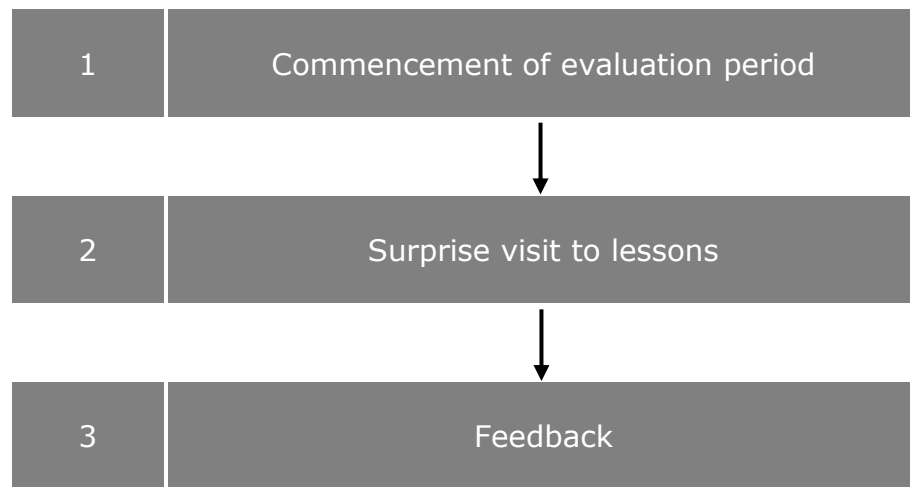
ST1, whose lesson was observed a week before, explained that the maths and the science HoDs visited her class. She revealed that it was a surprise visit; 'We are not told. So it's like a surprise; they just enter the class and sit in the back'. She had no complaints about the manner the visits were carried out; quite the contrary, she preferred it this way; 'It keeps me on my toes, and I like the system; I really like it'.

When discussed with the principal, she defended the 'surprise' fashion:

Why should I tell them? I used to be a teacher, and I used to be a very good teacher. So the teachers should be prepared any time, right?

Further investigations show that the lesson observations were not wholly surprising, after all. In one of the records of the staff meetings, dated 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014, under section 1 (see table 5.2), the principal had already made an announcement about them: 'Teachers have to be aware of the teachers' evaluation week'. This indicates that the 'surprise' element includes the precise timing of the visits, and not the broader timescale. The principal provided an updated version of accounts: 'Of course, yes, but not when exactly, but we will inform them that we will start our evaluation

maybe within this month'. Figure 5.1 displays the monitoring process.



*Figure 5.1: School B formal observation process*

Contrary to the English HoD's claims of the link between the observation and pay, all the participants viewed the monitoring in a positive light: 'This observation is for the purpose of developing you, and not for the purpose of checking if you're doing your job or not' (ST2).

Interview data provide some evidence for peer observation practice. The HoD spoke about it in favourable terms, but at the same time expressed some reservations such as teachers' resistance to it or unwillingness to share their experience. She added that the school decided to cancel it due to the poor reception by the teachers.

Despite this, and contrary to the English ST3's assumptions of 'high risks', there were powerful indications of teacher-led initiatives in the maths department. ST2 explained that, due to some complaints, ST1 requested assistance, as a result of which, he agreed to visit her class to provide advice. However, this

arrangement failed: 'We couldn't because the timetable kept changing'. ST3 reported an increase in his motivation: 'This year, I can see some very good teachers so I actually want to sit in their lessons'. He added that he learnt about his colleagues' teaching quality through students' feedback.

The most powerful evidence of CPD was offered by ST2 when the school agreed to sponsor his attendance at an externally held event in another international school for which, in his words, he was asked to sign a two-year bond. ST3 also spoke of a locally organised competition in which he and some competent maths students agreed to participate.

#### Leadership involvement

The extent of leadership involvement at the school level is extremely limited. The biggest role was played by the HoD, as evident through the observation data. The interview data confirmed this, too: 'If there is a new idea, [the principal] will take my opinion about it'. The principal had this to say about the HoDs:

Well, I involve them in almost everything. I have a lot of meetings with them. I give them the direction. The first step is to have a meeting with the heads of department, then we will meet the teachers, and ask the heads of department to pass whatever we need to the teachers.

The extent of the principal's notion of 'almost everything' is somewhat ambiguous. She had already made a distinction between serious and less serious matters. Further probing provided a new perspective on this. Contrary to the 'right-hand woman' image, the maths HoD deeply resented her lack of decision-making power and demanded more:



I cannot do anything because I don't have the [power to make the] decision. I'm so sorry to say that. The most important thing for me actually is to have a little space to take a decision. This is really more important than maybe other things because sometimes you need to take a decision now, just now. I cannot immediately take a decision. I should go and check with [the principal] for everything.

All the participants stated that the principal took the final decision. This researcher's first attempt to explore this matter was not very successful as the principal refused to answer the question: 'Oh, I won't answer; I'm sorry'. The second attempt managed to elicit this response from her: 'Do you think I'm the only decision maker in the school? – it's not me'.

Most of the maths teachers said that they were not given an opportunity to participate in their school's leadership: 'They don't consult me, but they do consult those who have been here longer' (ST1); 'Never! That is a huge let-down. I still feel they are not looking for my full potential' (ST2). ST3, though, sounded most content with the status quo:

It's like the issue will be discussed, but it's not necessary that your opinion will be taken. Everybody will participate, but at the end, the principal will see what is best.

Wider leadership involvement at the department level is virtually non-existent. When asked about the reason, the maths HoD chose not to make a comment on that: 'I can't say anything about it. I'm so sorry'. The teachers' remarks helped clarify this matter, though. Contrary to his earlier expectation for a full realisation of his potential, ST2 had this to say:

To be very frank with you, one of the reasons is that because I'm only getting half the pay of what I used to get in my previous school – exactly half. So, if they're paying me well, then I don't mind proposing to them that I can do this and that. But if they are willing to come up with a good package ... a decent allowance, then I don't mind taking up the position.

Comparing her status now with the time she was running an educational centre, ST1 claimed she had 'no responsibility' now. When asked about her ignorance of many things that were taking place around her, she chose to link it to her temperament:

It could also be my nature. I do notice a lot of teachers know so many things. I just know my work, and I know my students, but I'm not worried about the politics, and who's doing what.

ST3 sounded most satisfied with his role. He made a distinction between things he was allowed to do within the classroom compared to wider roles:

You have your own freedom like changing anything that you see right in your specialisation, but not outside your specialisation of course. If I was a class teacher, I would have the freedom to change something inside the class, OK, but to change something for the whole school, you need to go to the principal of course; it would be a mess if a teacher wanted to change something.

ST3's dichotomy resonates with the serious and less serious distinction noted earlier. The HoD made a reference to this matter, and she preferred to distinguish between 'small' and 'big': 'We can take a decision for small things, but if we have a bigger problem, we should consult [the principal]'.

There were conflicting, and at times surprising, assessments of the quality of school and departmental leadership. Given the 'all roads lead to the principal' analogy, all the participants chose not to evaluate their departmental leadership. Most surprisingly, the HoD commented that she felt frustrated as she had limited authority: 'Yes, because I can't do anything at this level. I want to do something, but they don't allow me to'. Both ST1 and ST3 expressed satisfaction with their school's leadership. The only teacher who felt frustrated was ST2 who complained about his competencies being ignored:

I am [frustrated] because technically I've got so many things in my mind, and I've got my skills, but I'm just being used as a normal ordinary teacher. I feel that [frustrated], yeah.

The evidence points to a maths department characterised by suppressed aspirations on the one hand, e.g. the HoD and ST2, and unrestrained freedom on the other, e.g. ST1 and ST3.

### **Science Department**

The science department consists of an all-Malaysian staff. The HoD has the longest tenure of all in the department with a teaching load of six hours a week, experiencing his first role as leader in an international context. ST1 is the most experienced teacher in the department.

The participants agreed to attend separate interviews. Observations were conducted in the staffroom and the staff meetings. Relevant sections in the documents were also examined.

## Roles

The science HoD looked after various aspects of the school. In addition to being an HoD, he was the head of student affairs as well as in charge of the school's filing section. During the staff meetings, he was observed taking the minutes and his signature appears on all the records. In two meetings observed with the principal, he was welcomed alongside the maths HoD.

The interview data indicate that this leader's role as the HoD is secondary to that of student welfare. None of the teachers would recognise him as the science HoD. ST1 remarked that they were working 'kind of by [them]selves'. ST2, who taught multiple levels, joked that *she* was the 'department'; 'Right now I'm teaching [subjects withheld] to years 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. So, basically I'm the science department'. In explaining the preparation work that was under way for equipping the lab, ST3 referred to the principal and not to the HoD: 'The principal asked us to prepare the lab to find out what equipment we need'. Despite this, on several occasions, the HoD described his engagement with the teachers thus:

Sometimes I have to make sure they are following the updated syllabus because Cambridge keeps updating their syllabus. And we have this online software, in which they will update their lesson plans, schemes of work and everything, so I have to make sure they are doing it correctly.

These remarks imply that the HoD's interactions with the teachers barely go beyond that of an 'inspector'.

### Responsibilities

The HoD described his responsibilities along the same lines as that of a guardian of the syllabus. But, he also chose to highlight his responsibilities towards the students:

Also, I'm in charge of the student affairs here. I deal with the students' problems. But, I don't really narrow down my [job] scope to the students because it also includes dealing with the parents.

The science HoD chose to attach great importance to his position in the school:

I play an important role in this school, like let's say, I'm absent for one day, my phone will like keep on ringing 24 hours. You know, I'm always busy.

On further probe, the HoD's actual job scope turned out to consist of preparing the certificates, consulting the teachers about work problems, preparing the reports for the meetings, i.e. the minutes, invigilating the exams, and analysing the examination results. This extensive scope helped explain the rationale behind the teachers' perceptions, and the HoD's position within the school's leadership team.

### Role relationships

All the participants spoke in positive terms about their relationships with the principal: 'Very good, very good' (HoD); 'She's approachable; she's open to suggestions, and she respects people who get things done without being told' (ST1). Similarly, ST3 praised the principal for her attitude: 'She really takes the time and listens to you, and does something about it'. ST2 chose to respond to this question through a different perspective: 'I'm

still new. She is the principal, so I know where I must be. I'm the teacher, and she's the principal'. ST2's remark tends to suggest the existence of an 'us/they' divide, which was occasionally evident in staffroom discussion. She added:

I think there is a gap between the management and teachers. So I don't know what the management is thinking; we don't know anything at all. So for me, comparing with my last school, it's really messy.

While sounding unanimous in acknowledging the principal, so were the teachers in *not* recognising the HoD. In contrast to the HoD's claims of 'very good' relationships with the teachers 'because they [would] consult' him, all the teachers mentioned the principal as their first point of reference. ST2 said she would consult the principal about the 'syllabus' and the 'checkpoint' as 'the only person in charge'. She added that this was 'much easier' as the HoD was also 'not sure about some things'. While ST1 felt 'obliged' to provide the principal with a 'report on lab activities, students' attendance, participation and homework submission', ST3, in a tone charged with surprise, rejected her HoD and chose to downgrade his position to that of an 'administrator'. She added that she would either browse the web or contact her colleagues when in doubt.

It appears that the HoD's multiple roles have had a negative impact on his image as the leader of the science department.

### Instructional engagement

The data about the monitoring mechanism validate, to a large measure, the remarks previously made. The science HoD, though, was able to provide more information. He confirmed the 'dual

observer' system, and justified the 'surprise' aspect of the class visits:

Because sometimes when we tell the teachers that we're going to class, they will prepare. We want to see what actually they are doing in normal classes.

He added that the school took the quality of teaching and learning seriously because 'parents are not going to keep quiet'. He revealed that there were three ways to learn about a teacher's instructional quality; students' comments, parents' feedback, and teachers' evaluation. Among the documents that this researcher was permitted access to, there exists none that detail the observational aspects, but the HoD claimed that the evaluation form consists of four sections with an equal weighting of 25 marks each. Table 5.3 illustrates these reported sections.

Section	Focus	Weighting
1	Teaching	25
2	Classroom management	25
3	Homework	25
4	Student engagement	25
		100

*Table 5.3: School B observational aspects*

Of the three teachers, only ST1 had been observed. The process he described tallied exactly with the accounts provided. He was informed about 20 minutes in advance, which he found not polite enough; 'It would have been a little more polite to have let me know earlier'. His lesson was observed by the principal and the science HoD for the whole period, i.e. 45 minutes. After the lesson, and while the students were still in class, he was called to the back of the room for a feedback session which, according to ST1, lasted only three minutes. His lesson was rated as 'satisfactory'.

Although he sounded confident about his competencies, he seemed critical of the manner the observation was conducted.

Contrary to this perceived importance of instructional monitoring, in none of the staff meetings was the quality of teaching and learning discussed seriously. In the second meeting, the only talk about this revolved around the school's software for posting lessons. In a document, titled 'report on teachers' development training', there are eight records of CPDs from 2012 to 2015, signed by the science HoD. Six of these relate to training on tablets, the school's portal, and smartboards, which were observed to be available in senior classes only, i.e. Years 10 and 11. Two other documents discuss children with special needs, and medical rights.

No indications could be found of any training on the aspects mentioned in table 5.3. However, ST1 reported a case of a visit to his class made by ST3 as part of teacher-led CPD.

#### Leadership involvement

Referring to his whole-school involvement, the HoD perceived himself as a leader, and described it thus: 'We are all leaders because the teachers are given the chance to control the students in classes'. Contrary to the 'all leaders' remark, the HoD admitted his leadership limitations, though inadvertently:

Almost all the decisions are approved by the principal. So, I can't be simply giving instructions because I have bigger people than me here, so I consult them before I give orders to them [the teachers].



The HoD added that the principal had given him permission to decide on matters about 'education', but not on issues such as 'school structure or fees'. This comment resonates with the serious and less serious notion discussed previously, and is reflected in ST1's account of his leadership responsibilities, which mainly include cover for absent colleagues, co-curricular activities, and daily duties. Both ST2 and ST3 rated their leadership role as extremely limited. Although there were some faint indications of whole-school consultation, observations show that most decisions were made on the basis of 'personal suggestions', without necessarily subjecting them to rigorous discussions, in order to achieve agreement. Hence, taken at face value, most of what seemed to be consultations were indeed instructions.

Leadership at departmental level was directly affected by the relationships among its members. While ST1 had decided to 'step back' from his difficult decade-long management tenure, ST2 expressed her disinterest in leadership posts. ST3 remarked thus; 'There is no leadership. Nobody's taking charge so like everybody's doing their own part'. This is in contrast to the HoD's claim that decisions in his department were made in unison, as he lacked experience in teaching [subject withheld]. This comment may not be wholly untrue, as it is linked to teaching and learning where teachers possess authority.

The HoD expressed overall satisfaction with the school's leadership as they are willing to 'listen'. He felt alike about his department as he found the people obedient enough. Accordingly, he assessed his leadership as effective. All the teachers, on the other hand, mentioned aspects on which the school could

improve, e.g. leadership (ST1), communication (ST2), and management (ST3). ST1 disclosed that he had moved from effectiveness to frustration; 'Initially when I came to this school, I was expecting it to be perfect'. ST2 felt effective within the classroom; 'There's just no one saying, "You can't do this"', or "'do that'". At the school level, she felt frustrated as there were 'no guidelines'. ST3 rated her performance as effective within the class, but was not confident to locate herself within the school.

### **Overview**

The grand metaphorical picture that emerges from School B represents it in the shape of a 'bicycle wheel', consisting of a set of spokes, a number of beads, but with one hub. The hub illustrates the position of the principal, to whom all the spokes, i.e. the lines of attention, lead. On these spokes are beads where each represents a participant who is positioned asymmetrically in relation to the hub. In the case of the English HoD, this spoke is severed from the hub, but still clinging on to the rim.

Middle leadership in School B is loosely defined. The only reference consists of a few lines in the document dedicated to explicating its 'rules & regulations'. This lack of clarification has paved the way for selective interpretations of the role. What unites, or otherwise, the HoDs with the principal is unclear, but what is certain is that it is *not* their role. This makes it difficult to discuss middle leadership in terms of departments because such a concept barely exists in the minds of the participants. However, of all the departments, English is the least cohesive. The HoD's role and responsibilities are unchartered. In contrast, the maths and science departments are led by leaders for whom the HoD role,

among their multiple responsibilities, is the least priority. These circumstances have forced the participants to rely on the principal for accessing 'accurate' information.

Overdependence on the principal has several implications. In the first place, this has rendered the position of the HoDs redundant in the eyes of the teachers. Second, this has caused an increase in the principal's workload, forcing her to stay at school until late. This is despite the fact that the HoDs' average teaching hours are only nine hours. Finally, in the absence of a departmental identity, the quality of the participants' relationships with the principal is of great significance, as evident in the strained relations between her and the English HoD and the English ST3.

The claims about low pay, and fear of losing teachers, may have been a contributory factor for the principal's welcoming attitude. This may explain that why, despite tense relationships, all the participants expressed satisfaction with the principal, although less so with the way the school is managed, e.g. the English HoD, or the amount of autonomy they are authorised, e.g. the maths HoD. The interview and observation data suggest concentrated power at the top. This understanding is in conjunction with the 'spoke' metaphor whereby teachers have been left on their own. The HoDs aside, there is limited evidence of broad-based leadership except, perhaps, for the English ST2. In broad terms, the manner in which leadership is 'distributed' at School B is determined by tenure and relationships. The quality of the latter plays a key role in either attracting the HoDs to the principal, as in the case of the maths and science HoDs, or repelling them, e.g.

the English HoD. In short, behaviour or attitude takes precedence over expertise.

The only element that has thus far held the school together as an organisation is arguably its teaching and learning – the fundamental function of schools. Unlike its leadership aspect, school B seems to be more conscious of the importance of monitoring the quality of instruction, despite some criticisms of its aims, e.g. the English HoD, or the process, e.g. science ST1. The main impetus for this 'policing' is parents, who play the 'rim' part of the 'bicycle wheel' metaphor – holding the constituents together. Within the instructional framework, all the participants feel effective; this is the domain where opportunities for contacts with other adults are greatly diminished, and therefore, falls within the 'less serious' category some participants alluded to, e.g. the maths and science HoDs. Outside this, i.e. serious matters, perceptions were not as positive. In addition, there were a few utterances of satisfaction with the school in its entirety simply because some of the participants, e.g. maths ST1, perceived that they worked in a 'rule-free' environment, because the organisational rules and regulations had not been clarified.

Middle leadership at School B is loosely defined, poorly received and largely ignored. The principal acts as the mecca to whom all roads lead. In such a climate, the balance between the HoDs' subject expertise and their behaviour (attitude) has to tip in favour of the latter, the 'agreed' quality of which can facilitate the normal function of middle leadership.

## **Chapter Six: Case Study Report School C**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the third case study, hereafter referred to as School C. School C is an international school located in Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory. It offers the British Curriculum, culminating in the IGCSE. It has a predominately Malaysian student population of about 500 with 40 members of staff, the majority of whom are Malaysian. The school has a September-June academic calendar.

School leadership is split into senior and junior. The senior school is led by the head of secondary (HoS) who is assisted by a senior local teacher and an expatriate head of curriculum. The HoS has been in post since the beginning of the 2015/2016 academic year. According to the interview data, he is the eighth HoS since the school opened in the late 1990s. He is not Malaysian. There is also a post of deputy head which was vacant during the research period.

### **Methods**

This study explored middle leadership through five main themes; roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement (see table 4.1). Semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis were used across all the themes. The physical structure of School C was not conducive to observing participants' interactions. There are two rows in a V shape with each corridor allocated to a section. Almost all the participants had their own rooms to stay in for most of the day, with students moving from class to class. Those who

did not have a room would spend their non-contact hours in a small staffroom at one end of the corridor. A suitable place that afforded a full view of the secondary corridor was a spot opposite the maths room. The next section discusses the findings from the English department.

### **English Department**

The English department is staffed by an equally diverse ethnic team of an HoD and three teachers. The HoD is Malaysian who has been in this school for 10 years. She was initially recruited as a teacher, but, after a year, was promoted to lead the English department. She has a weekly teaching load of 17 hours.

All the practitioners in this department agreed to participate in this study. Observations were also carried out to capture, as much as possible, the professional interactions among the department members. Documents pertinent to the English department were also consulted.

### Roles

During this study, the school was in the process of seeking accreditation from an international agency. To meet the requirements, the school had undertaken various efforts, one of which required updating and completing the documents. This situation necessitated resorting to different sources for accessing documents. Having obtained the HoS's informed consent, the HoDs were asked for a copy of their job descriptions. Table 6.1 displays the sections of this four-page document.

Sections	Focus
1	Reporting relationships
2	Key roles
3	Scope of responsibilities

*Table 6.1: School C HoDs' job description sections*

'Key roles' describes the role of an HoD in the following terms:

A Head of Department (HoD) is a key middle leadership position. He/she maintains a full weekly teaching load with some reduction in periods built in for performing his/her responsibilities as a middle leader.

This description provides inadequate information about the role of the HoDs. The first line recognises the significance of the role, as also acknowledged by the participants to be 'really important' (HoD), 'a huge job' (ST1), 'important' (ST2), and 'a go-to guy for anything you need' (ST3). The second line stresses the teaching role of the HoDs, with the final line suggesting that, to gain further insight, one has to examine their responsibilities.

### Responsibilities

The HoDs' job description is mostly focused on discussing their responsibilities. This is section 3 in table 6.1. The 'scope of responsibilities' consists of five main sections and five sub-sections. Table 6.2 displays these.

Sections	Scope of Responsibilities
1	Responsibilities to members of the department
2	Responsibilities to the students
3	Responsibilities to the head of school
4	Responsibilities pertaining to administration of the department
	4.1 Budget, resources and planning
	4.2 Curriculum
	4.3 Assessment
	4.4 General administration
	4.5 Interview and admissions
5	Other

*Table 6.2: School C HoDs' scope of responsibilities*

Sections 1 to 4 situate the role of the HoDs in their literal 'middle' position as they are defined to be vertically responsible to the HoS, the teachers and the admin staff, and laterally to the students (and possibly to their parents). These expectations are not clearly visible in the role description above. The definition the HoD offers tends to put her students centre stage:

I perceive my role to [involve] bringing the students to the highest level possible of reaching their potential in all the four aspects of the language.

This role understanding is in conjunction with section 2 in table 6.2:

To provide the best possible educational experience both in and out of the classroom, for students of all abilities and at all levels in the school.

Contrary to the HoD's emphasis on the role of students, the teachers tend to view the role from a different perspective:

Well, it's somebody that supervises the other English teachers. Somebody with some expertise in the field, and a lot of experience. (ST1)



Her role is basically to guide us, and tell us what we are expected to do, and perhaps as and when we need help in anything. (ST2)

I suppose he/she will be a mentor that you can go to. Also, because they are an expert in their field, they have already probably set the curriculum, and the course of study, and they would explain it to you how to teach it. (ST3)

All the views above mainly fit into the first clause (of 9) of section 1 in table 6.2:

To lead, guide and support members of the department to oversee their professional development in conjunction with the Head of School (HoS), making recommendations (via the Deputy Head) for appropriate in-service training.

It is only ST3's opinion that extends into sub-section 4.2, i.e. curriculum (see table 6.2).

To prepare and maintain detailed schemes of work at all levels for use by members of the department in conjunction with the head of curriculum.

Despite the extensive scope of the HoDs' responsibilities, the participants' perceptions of the HoD's roles and responsibilities are selective and narrow.

#### Role relationships

The physical structure of School C is in the shape of a V. As this researcher's early morning observations show, a typical day would begin with all the homeroom teachers approaching their classrooms with a key in hand to open the doors. Even the HoS had his own key to his office. This image is highly reminiscent of Hargreaves' (1994:28) description of secondary schools as

'shopping malls'. The only time and venue where (all) the staff could arguably meet was during the break times in the school's dining hall. However, as observations revealed, while some tended to go there during their non-contact hours, some would prefer to have their snacks back in their classrooms. This arrangement impacted on the quality of the participants' interactions.

The teachers were wholly negative about their relationships with the HoD. ST1 complained about her lack of support and guidance:

My first day here I was just thrown into the bull ring shall we say. The principal said I'll be teaching English ... and then I just walked in to just speak to the English teacher whom I was taking over from. She said, 'OK, here you go teach a lesson'.

This attitude of the HoD is contrary to the terms of section 1 (see table 6.2) whereby s/he is expected to 'lead, guide and support' the department members. Similarly, ST3 described her first-day reception as a 'disaster':

I didn't even meet her that day. I didn't know who she was. It was a bit of a disaster. My introduction to this school wasn't great. I got back to the principal, and the head of department in the end apologised to me for the situation I was in.

Section 1 (see table 6.2) states that the HoDs 'induct new teaching staff into their department', a service that both ST1 and ST3 did not receive.

When asked about her relationship with the teachers, the HoD claimed that she would 'always pop in and talk to them', a remark that was neither confirmed by observations nor corroborated by

the interview data. In describing her relationship, the HoD chose to focus her attention on ST2. Having had minimal interactions with the HoD, ST2 attributed this to ‘a very tight timetable’ and to her, i.e. ST2, ‘being new [and] slow with certain things’. The HoD chose to see this matter through the lens of attitude and experience:

It took some time to impress upon her that certain things have to be done. Perhaps it’s the first time she’s in an international school. I interacted with her in the beginning quite a lot. Then she felt uncomfortable about it. Then it didn’t work, so I just stayed away for a while.

There is a four-page document that delineates the roles and responsibilities of the teachers. It has a similar structure to the HoD’s job description, though with some differences in sections. Table 6.3 displays the outline of this document.

Sections	Focus
1	Reporting relationships
2	Key roles
3	Scope of responsibilities
	1. Teaching & learning
	2. Co-curricular activities (CCA)
	3. Behaviour and safety
	4. Teamwork and collaboration
	5. Administration
	6. Professional development
	7. Other responsibilities
	8. Other

*Table 6.3: School C teachers’ job description*

According to sub-section 4, the teachers are required to ‘work as a team member and identify opportunities for working with colleagues and sharing the development of effective practice with them’. The HoDs’ document lacks such a requirement; even this articulation leaves the term ‘colleagues’ open to interpretation.

Nonetheless, the bottom line is clear: teamwork and collaboration, the absence of which, in the words of ST2, has had some perceived benefits:

I think there are advantages and disadvantages. Since we are isolated, we do more work; we don't tend to chitchat a lot. This is what has been happening in other schools.

During this study, the only time that the English participants met as a department was during a departmental meeting, which lasted 40 minutes, and had the following agenda:

- Schemes of Work
- Preparation of mid-year exam papers and submission dates
- Year 11 parents' evening
- Preparing students for model United Nations event
- Strategies to deal with students in need of help in English
- Negotiation over department meetings to fall within school hours
- Year 10 class list

During this meeting, the rapport between the participants was formal and professional. According to section 1 of the HoDs' document (see table 6.2), s/he is required to 'arrange department meetings on a regular basis'. However, as noted earlier, the accreditation endeavour had affected meeting times: 'We have some self-study going on for the [accreditation], which is a huge undertaking [which] takes a lot of our time'. (HoD)

In line with the accreditation project, the HoS's vision for the future direction of the school puts the role of the middle leaders centre stage:

[They are] the link between the senior management and leadership and the staff ... they're very important in regards to managing the staff and the future strategic plan, vision and journey of the school.

Although all the participants spoke favourably about their relationships with the HoS, it remains to be seen the extent to which the quality of the professional interrelationships in the English department can facilitate or hinder the realisation of the HoS's vision.

### Instructional engagement

Another document available is a two-page lesson observation form divided into three parts. It contains seven 'key areas' which spell out the observation criteria. Table 6.4 displays these seven key areas.

Key areas	Focus
1	Lesson planning, content & delivery
2	Creating a positive learning environment
3	Assessment for learning
4	Collaborative and cooperative learning
5	Questioning and thinking skills
6	Differentiation
7	Professional knowledge & reflection

*Table 6.4: School C lesson observation sections*

Each of these key areas are further divided into segments that require the observer to leave the following comments:

- E = evidence
- PE = partial evidence
- NE = no evidence

Contrary to the seemingly systematic view that this document outline may indicate, interview data from the English department

do not suggest a consistent understanding and a coherent practice of lesson observations. When asked to explain the process, ST1 said: 'I don't know if there is [any]; I'm not aware of it'. ST2 made a similar comment: 'Well, I'm not very sure; I don't really know about that'. The HoD had earlier claimed that she would observe lessons 'once a term' with 'all the forms given'. However, ST3 denied that she was observed in the first term: 'No, I think she trusts me. I think she's a bit short of time herself'. And ST2 denied that she knew the criteria beforehand, as claimed by the HoD. The HoD's practice contrasts with what the document mandates under section 3 (see table 6.2):

To support the Head of School (via the Deputy Heads) with the processes involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning taking place throughout the school, including lesson observations, setting and continuous monitoring of targets to ensure a consistently high quality of teaching and learning.

When asked to explain the process, the HoS helped to clarify these discrepancies:

Lesson observations have not been done this year. They are due to be done from the middle of February to the end of term 2 as part of staff appraisals.

The above-mentioned timing is crucial for two reasons. First, it follows the Chinese New Year when most schools are closed for almost a week in Malaysia. Secondly, according to a staff meeting minute, dated 5 January 2016, the estimated visit by the accreditation agency falls in the third week of March 2016. The decision to delay lesson observations may have been taken with

a view to creating space for the staff to devote all their time and effort to the accreditation project.

Little evidence emerged about peer observation. ST2 linked it to clashing teaching slots: 'The thing is most of the time when she [the HoD] is teaching, I may be free, and when I'm busy, she may not be free'. This statement casts a doubt over what the HoDs' document calls 'reduction in periods built in for performing his/her responsibilities'. As part of the CPD, only the HoD said that she had attended a sponsored course in Singapore. However, according to the staff meeting minutes, an internal CPD was discussed to take place on 9 January, which would last for four hours. According to this document, the training would 'cover aspects of teaching and learning, assessment, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, [and] positive psychology'. This session was led by the HoS, as he revealed in his interview. The fact that this training was not departmentally oriented may help explain why none of the participants in the English department talked about it.

As far as instructional engagement is concerned, the image that emerges from the English department is one that is largely characterised by uncertainty: 'I don't know anything about this school' (ST1); 'No, nothing [i.e. staff handbook] was given'. This contrasts with section 1 (see table 6.2) whereby the HoD is responsible for 'ensur[ing] that the department members are aware of all school and department policies'.

#### Leadership involvement

There is limited evidence of leadership involvement at department level, and whenever there is any, all the tasks are linked to teaching and learning:

We make decisions on curriculum matters and related to curriculum matters. There are a lot of things like selection of textbooks ... we [also] work on schemes of work. (HoD)

The tasks reported by the teachers tend to revolve around matters related to teaching and learning. ST1 spoke of 'testing time' and 'reporting time', and ST2 and ST3 mentioned 'games and competitions' and 'debates' respectively. This perceived limited opportunity for broadened leadership roles contrasts with what the document requires, that HoDs 'delegate departmental duties by agreement with regard to each colleagues' interests and abilities'. When asked about the teachers' degree of autonomy, the HoD took a somewhat confrontational tone:

If I give the authority to make their own decisions, it would be something like, 'I don't want to teach this', 'I don't want to teach that', and there's no room for that.

The teachers' perceptions towards their limited leadership roles in their department ranged from humility: 'So far I haven't been asked anything; I think because I'm new here' (ST2), to fascination: 'Total autonomy' (ST1); 'I did what I liked' (ST3).

All the teachers believed that it was still early to see themselves involved in leadership at school level: 'I'm still feeling my way' (ST1); 'Not yet; maybe in the future' (ST2); 'Nothing yet, but I think it will happen down the track' (ST3). The HoD sounded uninterested in assuming leadership roles beyond her department:

They offered me to be the head of junior school, and deputy head of the senior school, as well. I was not



interested because I have the great idea that my role here is mainly interaction with the children.

When asked about the limited school-level leadership opportunity, the HoS chose to make a link to the history of the school: 'I believe it has been quite autocratic from above; you just do as you're told. [Before], the school had no direction. People just came to work and went home'. As the new leader of his school, he explained how he intended to create a more inclusive leadership climate:

[B]ut now, through various staff meetings, and professional development days that I have been involved in with the staff, we can actually have some direction. I'm quite an open person, so I usually start the meetings with involving staff.

The only staff meeting that took place during this study was one that concerned the accreditation project. The staff were divided into groups, and allocated to a classroom. This researcher managed to attend a meeting in which six members of the staff were present, four of whom were involved in this study, including the HoDs of English and science. A non-participating teacher was based at the computer who would discuss the requirements of the accreditation agency, and fill in the slots in a form which was projected on the board. The HoS later joined this group. He was silent for most of the time, but would make comments if need arose. This provides evidence that the school is moving in a new direction, although time remains to show the extent of its success.

When asked about school-level leadership opportunities, the HoD simply repeated her departmental leadership roles. To implement these, she said she had sufficient autonomy: 'I have pretty much

good autonomy. I have never felt that I can't implement things'. Despite all these complications, all the teachers regarded their HoD as a knowledgeable leader who had plenty of autonomy. The HoD linked her freedom of action to tenure: '[I have] whole lot of autonomy. I'm the boss here because this is my area of work. I've been here for the last 10 years'. The HoD felt proud of her department mainly due to its 'brilliant' IGCSE results. Viewing the department through the management lens, the teachers thought it was 'mismanaged' (ST1), and in need of further improvement, i.e. ST2 and ST3. The HoS's view was in agreement with the teachers':

I think the [English] HoD is quite knowledgeable and has a lot of experience, but in regards to leadership skills, not the strongest in managing the department – not very collaborative.

Remarks about the school leadership sounded more positive. While the 'high turnover' the HoD alluded to had taught her to develop a 'you come and you go' stance, ST1 described it as 'fantastic'. ST2 had this to say about the school leadership: 'On the whole, the school is good because we have a good head. We're free to go and see him when we need it'.

ST3 spoke in positive terms about the school leadership, and demanded that the HoS be given more autonomy:

If he was allowed more autonomy, it would be managed much better than it is now. The owners of the school like to micromanage, and he's been here for a short time. I don't really think they trust him yet.

ST3's understanding is not much remote from reality. The HoS had this to say when he described the leadership of the school:

If the directors and the owners let us run the school, we'll flourish. If they put restrictions on us, and keep interfering, then we'll go backwards again to where it was.

All the participants in the English department regarded themselves as effective practitioners who had never felt frustrated perhaps because they had hardly stepped out of their 'comfort zone' to engage with the wider school community. This may explain why the HoS was unable to locate the English department within the effectiveness/frustration dichotomy.

### **Maths Department**

The maths department consists of an HoD and four teachers, three of whom agreed to participate in this study. The majority of the participants are Malaysian, except for one of the teachers. The HoD has been in this school for 15 years. Three years ago she was promoted to lead the maths department. She has a weekly teaching load of 14 hours.

All the participants agreed to take part in this study. Interviews took place at times convenient to their schedule. Recalling the physical structure of School C, the spot this researcher had chosen to base himself was most suitable as all the maths classrooms were in full view. Sections of documents pertinent to the maths department were also examined.

## Roles

In our interview, the HoD provided the following definition of her role:

I have to go and make sure that the lessons are conducted well; students [and] teachers are happy; they have all the materials [and] resources. [I also] check their classes. That's what I have been doing since I was appointed as HoD.

Table 6.2 outlines the HoDs' scope of responsibilities. The way the HoD chooses to define her role is closest to two separate sections of the document. The first line of the HoD's role conception links to section 2 (see table 6.2):

To ensure the provision of the highest quality teaching and of access to a range of activities as outlined in the scheme of work.

The majority of the remaining lines are linked to sub-section 4.1 (see table 6.2):

To maintain resources in good order and to organise and store departmental resources in a way that provides ready access to colleagues and maintain an inventory of departmental resources.

The definitions most of the teachers offer largely demonstrate the importance of teaching & learning, curriculum and assessment in the maths department:

Head of department is someone who has a control of the [teaching] methods, [and] of making decisions, and bringing people together, leading the staff to get the best results from the students we teach. (ST2)

Head of department should be responsible for the whole department; they need to define the curriculum then they have to check whatever we are going to teach. They check the scheme of work plus the quality of examinations. (ST3)

ST1's understanding, though, departs from his colleagues' articulations above: 'My understanding is [that] she is the head, which means I will report to her because of her seniority'. When asked to clarify, he chose to link 'seniority' to tenure: 'I think because she's been here since the school started', a claim which seems to be consistent with the HoD's tenure of 15 years.

### Responsibilities

The selective role conceptions above also extend to insights into role significance, and, to a large measure, overlap with the HoD's responsibilities. While ST3 described the role as 'important', alongside the HoD who saw the importance of the role in permitting her to feel 'part of the school', ST2 and ST3 chose to largely regard it along lines that identify it as a liaison or bridge:

I think they need a head mainly because the principal cannot be overseeing everything. (ST2)

Yes, it is an important position because it is there to bring everyone together; to make sure the deadlines are met [and] as a figurehead for anybody to find new information. (ST3)

These interpretations are closest in meaning to section 1 (see table 6.2):

To ensure regular and effective liaison with colleagues throughout the school including SENCO, IT and Library staff.

Conceiving of the HoD as a link is not confined to these participants. The HoS tends to view the role incumbents as 'link[s] between the senior management and the staff', and offers the following description:

Obviously they have to be knowledgeable people that have experience. They bring their skills to this particular school ... to obviously make this institution better and the students in their educational outcomes.

The HoS's understanding contains aspects such as knowledge, experience and skills, which, compared to the one provided in the document, provides a different perspective on the roles and responsibilities of the HoD. Broadly speaking, the HoD role conception in the maths department seems to be dominated by managerial overtones rather than leadership. There is a lack of clarity about the balance of a role that is subjectively understood and arbitrarily interpreted.

#### Role relationships

The documents about the HoDs do not contain any section about the strategies they can utilise to regulate the members' relationships in the department, except for a sub-section in the teachers' document about 'teamwork and collaboration' (see table 6.3). Generally, the participants did not report any cases to be considered as typical or abnormal. The HoD was happy about her relationship with the HoS, and equally so with the teachers. The participants sounded positive about their relationships with the HoD, except perhaps for ST1 who described it as 'average'. Disagreements usually revolve around issues such as exams and deadlines:

I've got a fairly good relationship. Sometimes it can be strained, especially during exam times when there is an important deadline to meet.

The interview data with the HoD reveal the existence of a certain 'protocol' in the form of an organisational hierarchy: '[The teachers] have come to me because that's how the protocol is: You have to go and see your HoD first if you have any problems' (HoD). The HoS expressed a similar belief. Speaking about communications with parents, he sounded determined in highlighting the role (and perhaps the significance) of middle leadership:

We have a communication policy in place, and procedures have been sent to the parents that they don't need to come to the head of school for everything. I reject parents' offers to come to see me. They talk to the classroom teacher first, then the head of department who runs that department, and then I will support the head of department if need be ...

Section 3 of the HoDs' job description (see table 6.2) spells out the responsibility of the HoDs in the following terms:

To bring forward problems of any kind arising from the teaching of the subject and to inform the Head of School (via the Deputy Heads).

Section 1 of the same document (see table 6.2) demands that the HoDs organise meetings 'on a regular basis'. This does not seem to be the case with the maths department. As the interview data demonstrate, calls for meetings are made on an 'if need be' basis:

Actually we are now so busy because of the [accreditation]. It depends on the situation ... The principal

said if we don't have the time, we can email; if we have the time, we can meet face to face.

This claim of the HoD's agrees with the teachers' remarks about the departmental meetings, but contrasts with what the HoS regards as ideal as he thinks that these should take place 'once every fortnight'. It seems that the term 'regular basis', as stipulated in the document, has been interpreted variously by different practitioners.

### Instructional engagement

The interview data highlight discrepancies in understanding, and inconsistencies in conducting, lesson observations. The main differences involve the observers, and the frequency of observations. The involvement of the following practitioners emerged from the conversations:

- head of school
- head of curriculum
- deputy head
- head of department

To gain an insight into the process, the HoD explained that the HoS (whom she later changed to the head of curriculum), would inform all the HoDs of the schedule. This involves 'checking exercise books, observing lessons, and checking classrooms'. This description may suggest the absence of a systemic and systematic view, a point supported by the teachers' uncertainty. While ST1 remarked that lessons would be checked 'once *or* twice a year' (emphasis added), ST2 had to think for a while to figure out this response: 'I think I was observed twice last year'. ST3 added to the complications: 'We have three terms ... the observations we



used to have [were] like once a term'. Recalling the moratorium the HoS had called for observations due to the on-going accreditation project, the participants had to rely on their past experiences. However, this still suggests the absence of a clear framework for observations.

Contrary to uncertainties about lesson observations, there was more agreement among the participants about peer observation. The interview data reveal that the maths practice-sharing activities involved visitors from, and visits to, other subjects, e.g. 'biology' (ST2), or 'English' (ST3). It also emerged that some participants had devised their own criteria for inviting colleagues: 'I choose people I'm comfortable with because I know some people are not really keen to give you a feedback' (ST1).

Given these cross-curricular efforts, observations showed that there were barely any interactions between the maths teachers, most notably ST1 and ST3, whose classrooms were next to each other. When asked, ST3 said: 'Sometimes when it is necessary because we don't teach the same classes [i.e. grades], so we don't disturb [each other]'.

This remark contrasts with sub-section 4 (see table 6.3) whereby teachers are expected to 'work as team members and identify opportunities for working with colleagues and sharing the development of effective practice with them'. Despite this perceived absence of collaboration, all the participants spoke of CPD opportunities, which could be taken as a platform for departmental sharing of practice. These contradictions raise serious questions about staff induction and handbook. When asked, a set of new contradictions began to emerge. While the

HoD claimed that she did not have a staff handbook, all the participating teachers confirmed that either they had it once they started work, e.g. ST1 and ST2, or was in their contracts, e.g. ST3. According to the documents, it is the HoD's responsibility to 'ensure that the department members are aware of all school and department policies', an awareness that, in the maths department, is with the teachers rather than the HoD.

### Leadership involvement

The interview data show that there are more leadership opportunities at school level compared to department level. Although section 1 (see table 6.2) demands that HoDs 'delegate departmental duties by agreement with regard to each colleagues' interests and abilities', the maths HoD blamed shortage of time for not doing so: 'because everyone's so busy'. In the meantime, not everyone had a passion for leadership. For example, ST2 preferred to concentrate on his specialist subject rather than become engaged in the leadership of the department:

I really don't want to have anything to do, or actually be part of leading a team. I like to focus on my particular subject.

Despite the limited leadership opportunity at departmental level, there were some reservations about it. ST1, who would scarcely interact with his colleagues, sounded to have learned it the hard way:

If you want to implement something, you'd better not relate to anyone else because different people may not agree with you. If the thing is related to your own classroom, you can decide because this is yours. I don't collaborate with anyone else, so that's fine. If I want to

make any higher decisions, I think I should ask some senior teachers, or the head of department. It's very dangerous.

When asked to elaborate these perceived risks, he mentioned 'parents': 'Maybe the parents will complain. It's very common here ... because they pay'.

The frequency of parental complaints may explain the HoS's decision, noted above, to highlight the HoDs' role in responding to the parents' complaints. Also, ST2 sounded unhappy about his HoD's attitude, 'I think it would be nice to have your opinion heard. Sometimes it's less opinion, and more sort of this is what we're going to do'. This understanding tends to agree with the HoS's description of the limited leadership opportunity: 'I believe it has been quite autocratic from above; you just do as you're told', although, subsequently, ST2 denied that his HoD was autocratic; he chose to put it as 'quite biased towards her own opinion'.

The interview data reveal the extent of leadership opportunities at school level. According to the HoD, she was responsible for relief and senior school academic timetabling. As for the former, it was observed that, early in the morning, the HoD would post a relief schedule on the notice board opposite the HoS's office. One such document, dated 26 January 2016, shows five teachers were absent for whom cover teachers were arranged, a duty expected of teachers according to sub-section 4 (see table 6.3). ST1 has responsibilities which include head of [name withheld] sports house, form tutor, daily duties, and international school fairs duties. ST2 is a member of the pastoral team, and head of a

student body. ST3 disclosed that he had been the maths HoD for five years. His current role involves managing the internal and external, i.e. the IGCSE, examinations. There is a section in the staff meeting minutes which discusses examinations. ST3 is identified there by name in the capacity as the 'head of examinations'. In it, he reminds the teachers to be 'punctual when they have invigilation duties and to follow the IGCSE regulations'. In addition, various sections of the teachers' job description (see table 6.3) point to duties such as pastoral care, CCAs, daily duties, and school activities and events. The term that discusses delegation of duties appears in sub-section 7 (see table 6.3), and is as follows:

To undertake any other duties reasonably delegated by the Head of School or the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

Considering the reservations above, all the participating teachers agreed that their HoD was knowledgeable in the subject matter, although the HoD herself thought that she was 'still learning'. Remarks about the extent of the HoD's autonomy varied. While the HoD rated her autonomy high for relief timetabling, she felt less so about the academic timetabling. ST2 linked the HoD's autonomy to the nature of the issues she had to deal with. ST3 described his HoD's autonomy from a different perspective, as he linked it to the budget available to each department: 'Anything under the budget, on the spot, she says yes. We have a budget; within the budget she can say yes if we want to buy anything'. Sub-section 4.1 (see table 6.2) states that the HoDs 'prepare the annual budget request for the deputy head (senior/junior) and to manage the department budget, in conjunction with the accounts department'.

All the participants expressed satisfaction with the leadership of the department, and equally so for the school leadership, although some participants remarked that the HoS was new and needed more time, e.g. ST1 and ST2. The HoD evaluated her leadership as 'effective': 'I don't have any problems. Deadlines are met – the most important thing [is] deadlines'. ST3 expressed a similar view: 'I have high freedom in terms of teaching within the syllabus'. While regarding their performance as 'effective', both ST2 and ST3 spoke of their experiences of frustration:

When it comes to school matters, I feel frustrated because ... some people are very mean [and] don't appreciate what you do. They are very individualistic ... [there is] no support system. (ST2)

I was actually around this area [effectiveness]. You know, you come in positive and you have a little bit of autonomy, and then fall back into sort of slight frustration but obviously moving back towards this direction [effectiveness]. (ST3)

The HoS expressed satisfaction with the leadership of the maths department, but added that it could still improve. He also chose to locate it on the border between effectiveness and frustration, an evaluation quite consistent with the other evidence in the department, considering the equal views of the HoD and ST3, who assessed their performance as effective, compared to those who had experiences of frustration, e.g. ST1 and ST2.

### **Science Department**

The science department comprises an HoD and three teachers, one of whom is not from Malaysia. The HoD has a tenure of 15 years. He was promoted to lead the science department after two years into his service. He has a weekly teaching load of 15 hours.

All the four participants agreed to attend separate interviews. They spent most hours of the day in the four labs, which were in sight for the researcher. The only lab which was out of view was the HoD's, but he would always use the secondary corridor and, in this way, it was possible to observe his daily interactions. Sections of the document pertinent to the science department were also scrutinised.

### Roles

Examining the teachers' role definitions of the HoD illustrates a predominant tendency towards regarding it as a conduit:

He's just an intermediate. He's the one who has meetings with the leadership team ... reports on what's been done ... tells us what schemes of work should contain, how to design tests. (ST2)

Head of department is usually a coordinator to get information about many things from the head of curriculum to spread it to us ... so I would say that the head of department is usually a facilitator or a coordinator of things. (ST3)

These views are consistent with the HoS's remark that the role is 'a link between the senior management and the staff'. Given these interpretations, ST1 chose to see it as a role that involves knowing 'what the needs of each department are'. The HoD himself chose perspectives characterised by managerial tasks, and charged with sentimental attachment:

Someone who will oversee the department to make sure its smooth running, and it's the core section of the school. I do take pride in this faculty because I feel that the machinery of the school is hinged quite a bit on this department.

Such a proud and positive view was not shared by all the teachers, though. While ST2's remark tends to agree with her HoD's, ST1 and ST2 do not accord the role great importance: 'Not that really important' (ST1); 'Not really a highly important position' (ST3). In the documents, the only reference to the significance of the HoD position describes it as 'a key middle leadership position', a recognition that is confirmed by the HoS's remark that the role is 'pretty vital'.

In the science department, different views about the HoD include role definition, and perceptions about role significance.

### Responsibilities

All the role articulations above are underpinned by distinct clauses in the HoDs' job description, although the language may vary. For example, section 1 (see table 6.2) states that the HoDs 'ensure regular and effective liaison with colleagues throughout the School including SENCO, IT, and Library staff'. Also, sub-section 4.1 (see table 6.2), expects them to 'ensure regular and effective liaison with colleagues', as well as to 'acquire suitable resources for the teaching subjects'.

There are several sections and sub-sections in the HoDs' four-page job description. However, what the participants perceive forms only a fraction of what the HoDs are expected to do.

### Role relationships

The interview data provide some evidence of positive relationships between the participants in the science department. However, on closer examination, some underlying tensions emerge. ST2 and ST3 spoke favourably about their relationships with their HoD:

'Very good; he's very helpful' (ST2); 'Good relationship; we've been working together for quite some time' (ST3). However, ST1 did not sound positive enough: 'No special relationship ... I can't go to him; he won't be able to help me'. ST1 added that, to solve her problems, she would approach ST3 for advice. A similar tension could be discerned in the HoD's statement:

It's good! Of course you may have some difficulties ... so we have one or two members who are older than me. So I have to be more careful when I talk to them.

During this study, this researcher was able to attend a departmental meeting held in the HoD's science lab. The interview data show that there is no particular system in place for what the document calls, 'meetings on a regular basis' (see section 1, table 6.2). This meeting was suggested by ST1, as her communication with ST2 about exam requirements had led to some misunderstanding. She said:

I asked [ST3] to send a message for a meeting because the teacher next door is new to [subject withheld], so I told her to get together and set the paper. She said, 'No, we've covered this many subjects' ... so I said, 'That's not the way it's done' ... there was some misunderstanding there.

During the meeting, the interactions between the participants were professional and decent. There is no section in the document to explicate ways to resolve differences of opinion. However, it seems that the HoS's strategy for highlighting the role of the middle leaders in addressing parental issues has also been embraced by the participants in this department.

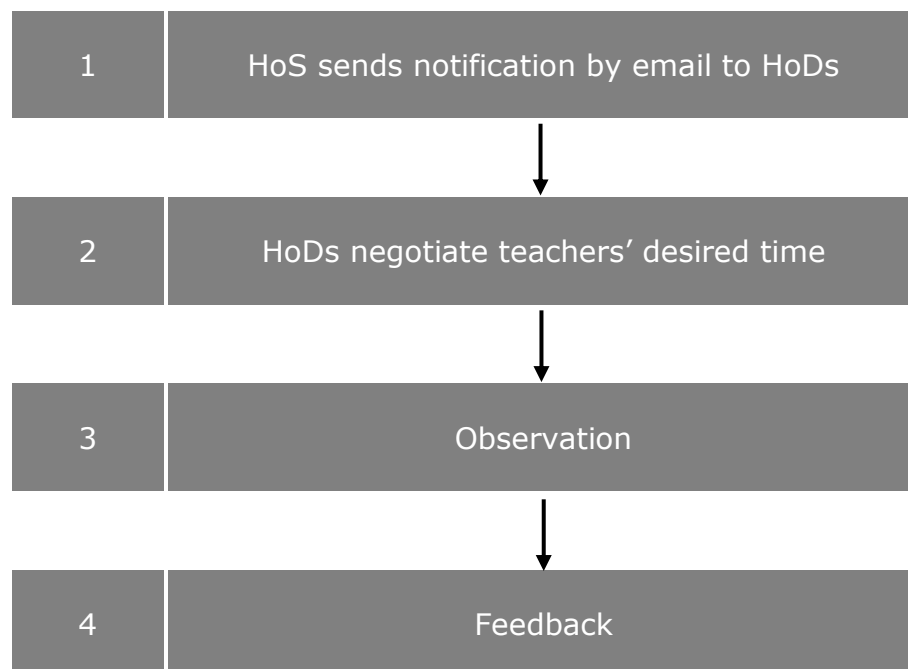


### Instructional engagement

Confusion over the frequency of lesson observations was evident in the interview data. All the teachers' responses ranged between once and twice, with their leader hesitating between once and twice a year. However, interview data provide some new information, and reveal some concerns. ST3 explained the observation process thus:

Usually it comes from the head of school. He will inform the heads of department to observe the teachers within this period of time. We will get emails [and] send him [the HoD] our teaching periods.

She also added that the observers would be the HoS, the curriculum head, the deputy head or the HoD. Figure 6.1 illustrates this process:



*Figure 6.1: School C formal observation process*

Both ST1 and ST3 expressed concern over the 'informed' nature of lesson observations:

I don't personally think it's right because if you're telling me you're coming, I'll make my lesson as perfect as I can. The rest of the time I may be playing the fool. (ST1)

Another concern revolved around the goal of observations. The popular term in School C for lesson observations was 'appraisal', and it is at this juncture that contradictions begin to emerge. Section 3 (see table 6.2) in the HoDs' job description, clearly speaks of 'lesson observations ... to ensure a consistently high quality of teaching and learning', whereas the teachers' job description speaks of 'appraisal' only:

Be responsible for improving your teaching through participating fully in training and development opportunities ... as an outcome of your appraisal ... (Sub-section 6, see table 6.3)

Proactively participate in arrangements made in accordance with the appraisal process. (Sub-section 6, see table 6.3)

ST1 believes that the goal of lesson observations is appraisal:

Honestly, I think it's more for appraisal. The previous head [of school] used to give feedback, but others no. This HoD just says, 'This is fine – [your grade is] between 1 and 5'.

This claim was commented on by the HoS, who added that this would change in the future:

At the moment the lesson observation that the school does is linked only to staff appraisal. It is changing to a professional learning plan for the next academic year. It works on the mentor-mentee system with regular lesson

observations, and conversations with teachers, senior teachers leading inexperienced or younger teachers.

Despite these discrepancies, evidence about peer observation and CPD emerged as a more coherent practice with many similarities to the experiences of the maths participants.

### Leadership involvement

There are limited indications of leadership involvement in the department. According to the teachers, they were either in charge of teaching a subject and/or of a homeroom. Also, there was little interest among the teachers for engaging themselves in broader leadership opportunities. For example, ST2 wished to focus on teaching, and she would not like to do leadership activities if they involved 'a lot of extra work'. ST1 had thought about it, but saw the promotion mechanism as a barrier to her career enhancement:

Nobody ever asked us. Those who were here for so many years went up the ladder ... I think the management took them out on the basis of [the number of] years they've been here.

The HoD dismissed the idea of broad-based leadership at department level. In his interviews, he unveiled the existence of a 'rotating' system:

Yeah, the reason for that [not broadening leadership roles] is because in this school there's a different system – people rotate. I've already accepted the fact that I may not be the department head next year.

This raises questions about the mechanism used to appoint middle leaders in School C. The HoD explained thus:

This information is not given to us. On the first day of the term, everyone is on pins and needles to see whose name will be on the screen. I think the decision could be based more on the politics of the school.

As mentioned earlier, tenure was perceived as one criterion to be used for appointing middle leaders. The interview with the HoS provided further insights:

I know that people are just asked to do it if they want to. If they don't want to, they [the directors/owners] go to the next person, and someone just volunteers to take the opportunity.

He added the following when he was asked about the appointment criteria:

There's no merit [system]. It's just a verbal offer. It's basically whoever wants to take the role. And once you take up the tenure, they're just given a job description, but they don't really know what to do with the job description. They just do what they think they are supposed to do.

Despite these reservations about the HoDs' appointment, all the teachers seemed satisfied with the extent of their autonomy in the department, although the HoD chose to make a distinction between serious and less serious matters:

If it's something very simple that does not involve costs to the management or the directors or the owners of the school, then I think that is fine. So, that depends on the sort of issues or things on the table.

There is little evidence to suggest that the participants in the science department are involved in whole-school leadership,

except for the HoD, and ST3. The latter is a senior member of the pastoral team. Her name appears on the staff meeting minutes who announces that the 'duty roster is ready and will be circulated'. She claims that she has a great deal of autonomy in this role, but still feels obliged to keep the HoS in the loop. She justifies her decision thus: 'I can send it [e.g. the duty roster] out [myself], but I feel if it goes from the head of school it carries more weight'.

The HoD regarded himself as a knowledgeable HoD, an assessment with which all the teachers agreed, except for ST1 who made distinctions between the sciences. ST2 graded her HoD's autonomy high, but others preferred to treat this matter with more caution. ST1 believed that the HoD received his orders from the owners and not the HoS. The HoD himself viewed his autonomy high within teaching and learning and less so when dealing with the senior leaders. It was ST3 who chose to provide further insights into this matter:

[For] certain things he has the freedom; [for] certain things he needs permission. Like if you want to make a big change here, like redesign the lab, he will have to go and get permission. But, if he wants to change the stools and tables to some other designs, maybe he can approve [himself].

Overall, the HoD sounded satisfied with the leadership of the department, although he thought of the position as rotating, with little attachment. The teachers sounded slightly critical; ST1 accused her HoD of 'delegating without thinking'; ST2 thought there was 'bad practice' happening in the department, which the HoD tended to overlook. Although ST3 said she had no complaints,

she was critical that the department lacked innovation. As for the school leadership, the HoD expressed satisfaction with the HoS's leadership style: 'He's good. He doesn't really disturb us. I like the fact [that] he allows the department to function as it should be'. He was critical, though, of the flow of information in the school. The teachers, notably ST2 and ST3, were also pleased with the new HoS, and preferred to direct their criticisms towards the owners.

The HoD expressed frustration over the 'rotation' system, and added that his inclination towards or away from effectiveness was determined by the nature of the issue. All the teachers felt effective with their activities within the boundary of their classrooms. Some of the causes for frustration were linked to equipment being not ready, e.g. ST2, or dependence on people for carrying out duties, e.g. ST3. The HoS seemed pleased with the management of the science department with possibilities for improvement, however, he chose to situate it on the border between effectiveness and frustration.

### **Overview**

No better metaphor than Hargreaves' (1994) 'shopping malls' can be used to describe School C. In fact, there is no shortage of imagination to create analogies such as egg-crates, bee hives, prison cells, pigeon holes, etc. But the manner in which the staff were observed every morning approaching their classrooms with a key in hand suggests resemblance to a 'souk'.

Middle leadership in School C is defined in its traditional sense, i.e. a teacher with additional responsibilities. This is evident in the role definition provided in the HoDs' job description. Although the

document tends to accord the role some degree of importance, the scope of this cannot be understood unless its scope of responsibilities is examined and grasped.

Given this extensive scope, the participants' conception of the HoD's role is fragmentary and selective. Two possible scenarios can be suggested to explain this; (a) visibility, and (b) invisibility. Visibility can be used to describe immediate services which teachers receive from their HoDs. Conversely, invisibility can be used to describe services which teachers do not receive from their HoDs when they are expecting them. For example, the English ST3 criticised her HoD for not providing a decent induction on the first day – this can be taken to be an invisible service. One of the key words that was used by two participants in two separate departments was 'disturb', e.g. Maths ST3, and Science HoD. This can be considered as a visible service, the absence of which is perceived as a benefit. It can be deduced from the remarks that whatever the participating teachers manage to mention, or fail to mention, about the roles and responsibilities of their HoDs are most probably linked to the services which they have either received (visible) or not (invisible).

A certain degree of 'subdued' resentment could be discerned among the participants in School C – a sort of unexpressed 'concord' that had convinced them to take refuge in their 'stalls'. The observed isolation of the participants could be taken as a contributing factor, or a reaction, to this uneasy relationship, which is more evident in English and science departments than in maths. Considering the leadership history of School C, one is convinced to associate the participants' behaviour with a

legitimate response to a highly volatile leadership trajectory. The participating teachers are not at odds with their HoDs, they *and* their HoDs are all victims of unstable leadership. This is clear in their conflicting responses about the school's instructional monitoring system, for example. What these three departments in School C represent is a relatively stable middle leadership. As the interview data indicate, the average tenure of the HoDs is about eight years each, compared to the seven previous heads of secondary with an average tenure that barely reaches three years.

In conjunction with the remarks above, it is not surprising to learn that leadership opportunities, at both department and school levels, are limited. There is some evidence of disinterest among the participating HoDs, e.g. English, and teachers, e.g. maths ST2 or science ST2. There is also some uncertainty about the future, most notably the science HoD. Broadly speaking, there is an inverse relationship between classroom- and non-classroom-based activities with job satisfaction and autonomy. Any activities pertaining to students tend to generate professional satisfaction and involve great autonomy. On the contrary, roles and/or tasks which require working with adults, i.e. colleagues, HoDs or senior leaders, tend to entail limited autonomy, which, in turn, leads to less satisfaction. According to the interview data, the notion of classroom- and non-classroom-based activities are respectively interpreted as less serious and serious by the science HoD and ST3.

The anticipated output of 'shopping malls' is profit. To achieve this goal, they need to be results-oriented. The evidence from the



English, maths and science departments in School C suggests a similar trend: deadlines, appraisals, budgets and assessments.

## **Chapter Seven: Case Study Report School D**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the fourth case study, hereafter referred to as School D. School D is an international school located in Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory. It offers the British Curriculum, culminating in the IGCSE. It has a predominately Malaysian student population of about 1500, with about 70 members of staff, 42 of whom serve in the secondary section, and are mostly Malaysian. The school has a September-July academic calendar.

School D is a new school, and was visited in its second year of service. The school senior leadership team comprises the principal, the head of secondary (HoS), and the head of primary. The principal has been in this post since the opening of the school in 2014, and superintends the executive function of the whole school. The HoS, in contrast, has been in this post since the beginning of this academic year in 2015, and is new to Malaysia's international education context. He is not Malaysian.

### **Methods**

This study explored middle leadership through five main themes; roles, responsibilities, role relationships, instructional engagement and leadership involvement (see table 4.1). Semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis were used across all the themes. The observation of the participants' interactions was mainly affected by the physical structure of the school. Given the on-going expansion plans, as witnessed during the study, all academic activities were conducted

in a single six-storey block (G-5). Table 7.1 displays the outline of the block.

Levels	Locations
5	Chemistry labs Staffroom KS4 Classrooms
4	Science labs Staffroom KS3 Classrooms
3	Science labs Staffroom KS2 Classrooms
2	DT labs ICT office Staffroom KS1 Classrooms
1	Library Art rooms Head of Sections Classrooms
G	Library Classrooms

*Table 7.1: Outline of School D academic block*

As the table shows, the office of the HoS is located on the first floor where the primary classrooms are. The secondary classrooms are two levels higher (four and five), with the science labs stretched across three floors. All the English classrooms are on Level 4, with the maths classrooms on the fifth floor. This structure hampered effective observation. To facilitate this, the researcher decided to spend more time observing interactions of the participants whose interviews had been scheduled to take place on that day.

### **English Department**

The English department comprises three Malaysian teachers led by an expatriate HoD who has been in this school since September 2015. Although she has experience of work in another

international school in Malaysia, this is her first experience of leadership. All the teachers have longer tenure than their leader, i.e. since 2014, and are experienced international school teachers. The HoD teaches for about 18 hours a week.

All the participants agreed to take part in separate interviews. Recalling the structural complications, four classrooms on Level 4 were allocated to English, where the participants spent most of their time. The researcher had to base himself in the open-space area opposite these rooms to capture the interactions. Sections of the documents pertinent to the English department were consulted.

### Roles

A document at School D contains the HoD's job description. This consists of three sections, as shown in table 7.2.

Sections	Focus
1	Outline
2	Responsibilities
3	Tasks

*Table 7.2: HoD job description sections*

The section under 'outline' describes the role of the HoD:

The head of department at [name of school withheld] is responsible for leading the teaching and learning, and administration of that subject in the school, and a number of teachers within that department.

There are some key words and phrases in this definition such as 'leading', 'teaching and learning', and 'administration'. In their attempts at defining the role of the HoD, all the participants alluded to some aspects of these functions:

I think she should be supportive, and give us some materials to support our teaching ... the head of department would normally have lesson observations with probably some feedback. (ST1)

I think the head of department influences the quality of learning and teaching. Of course this requires leadership, guiding us in learning and teaching process. (ST2)

[There are] mainly a lot of administrative jobs. She comes up with the SoW, and tough questions like what unit we're going to do, and when. She also prepares the exam papers. (ST3)

The HoD's perception of her role has some similarities with those of her teachers:

Initially, I made the assumption that [the] structure was already in place. Very quickly I realised that hasn't happened ... so my job initially is to get that structure back in place ... to re-focus on teaching and learning, and lift that up. I mean, ultimately, my goal is for the students to get the best results.

All the key words above can be located in these definitions. While there are mixed indications of leadership and/or management conceptions, there is considerable consistency in the participants' emphasis on teaching and learning.

### Responsibilities

The section on 'responsibilities' in table 7.2 contains 10 clauses. Tables 7.3 displays these.

Clauses	Focus
1	Coordinate & supervise all subject teachers
2	Observe teachers
3	Upgrade knowledge
4	Check students' written work
5	Conduct subject meetings
6	Check all examination/test papers
7	Manage resources
8	Plan scheme of work
9	Improve students' performance
10	Carry out directions from principal/HoS

*Table 7.3: HoD responsibilities*

As this table indicates, most of the clauses are directly or indirectly linked to teaching and learning. The priority given to instruction helps to explain why all the participants see the HoD's role as relating to the academic performance of the students.

#### Role relationships

There is no indication of any behavioural policies for the staff in the documents. Despite this, as the interview data reveal, all the teachers enjoy a positive relationship with their HoD. The most favourable comment was made by ST3 about her HoD's work discipline:

First time I met [name withheld], I was really impressed by the way she was organised, and I love that because I'm not very organised. It's quite easy to talk to her ... and she's very supportive.

This positive remark was reciprocated by the HoD when she described ST3 as someone with whom she could 'get on really, really well'. ST1 and ST2 were also pleased with their HoD:

So far it's good. I mean we do go out, and have some drinks, and at school, [name withheld] is professional ... she's very supportive. (ST1)

So far it's fine ... Of course, all sorts of characters that we deal with, we have to deal professionally. We may have personal issues, but so far nothing ... so far she's fine. (ST2)

Recalling table 7.1, all the participants were observed spending almost all their time in their classrooms on the fourth floor. During this study, rarely were they seen interacting with one another. In our interviews, the primary reason given was the timetable:

This is again the problem; very heavy timetable that we've all got. I've got only two free periods a week where none of us are teaching ... there's no space anywhere to think properly. (HoD)

This year it so happens that our timetables are really packed; like yesterday we didn't have a free period ... but we communicate via emails. (ST3)

Although there are two secondary staffrooms, neither of them was seen as being used appropriately. The KS4 staffroom, for example, was being used as a classroom for special subjects, such as Islamic studies, whereas KS3 had half of its space left unused by anyone. The interview with the HoD points to the existence of a hot-desking system.

The only time when all the participants were seen together was during a departmental meeting. The main agenda, which was a follow-up of an earlier staff training day, was as follows:

- Student behaviour
- Core values
- Teaching & learning
- Teacher assessment & monitoring
- Exams
- Home, parents & teachers' communication

During this meeting, the atmosphere was perceived to be collaborative and friendly. It seems that positive relationships among the participants have helped to compensate for their isolation.

This perceived positive climate in the department was not wholly matched by the relationship between the HoD and the HoS. Although not expressed explicitly, a sense of 'testing the waters' could be discerned in their comments:

I think there are still bits of communication that we haven't been clear with her, and she's not sure about all the aspects of her role. That's understandable because she's been here for [only] a few months. (HoS)

So far [it] seems fine. I mean I've not been here for that long, so we're still in early getting-to-know-you stages. So I always use the first few weeks to watch a lot, to listen a lot, see how meetings are run, how other people communicate with each other to get a sense of things. (HoD)

This cautious attitude could be linked to the structure of the school, of which the HoD seemed to be critical. After a comment on the importance of communication, she added:

It would be really helpful if there was a staffroom, [with] the head of secondary's [office] attached to it, so if we had a quick question, we could have that chat rather than trying to find them, run around to go down three storeys. It prevents you keeping that spontaneous. (HoD)

Given the limited impact of the physical structure of the school on the department climate, it seems that it has affected the relationship between the HoD and the HoS.



### Instructional engagement

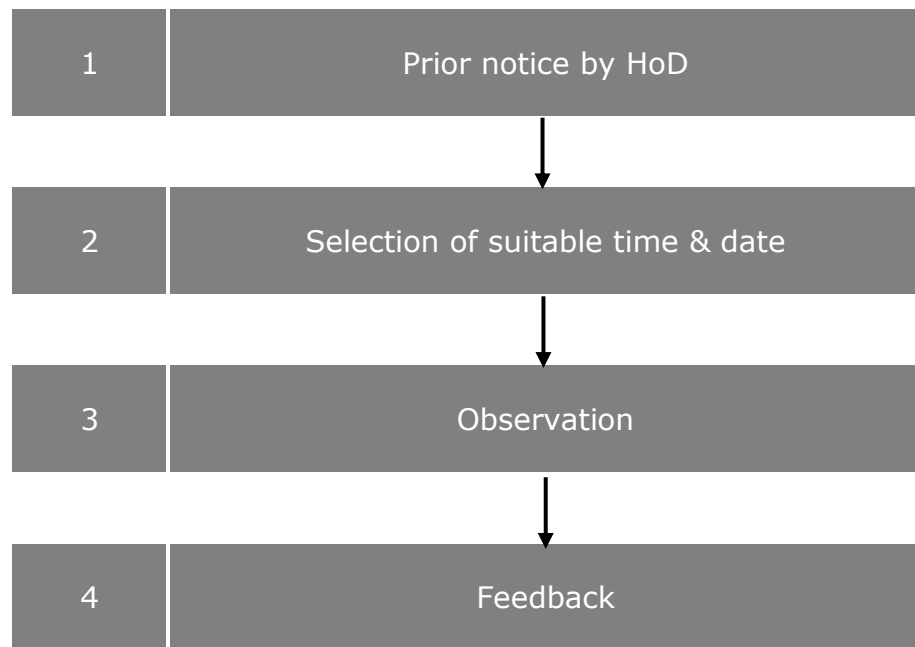
The HoD job description (see tables 7.2 & 7.3) contains a clause which is directly linked to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning:

To assist in the observation of subject teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of the subjects he/she is in charge of.

The interview data point to the existence of a lesson observation system, however, some inconsistencies can be discerned. There are two forms of observation; formal and informal. While the teachers seemed more confident about the process of formal observation, the HoD seemed less so. For example, she was unsure if a system for formal observations existed: 'There is I believe'. This contrasts with the description the teachers provided. In the document, there is a specific section about 'lesson observations', and is divided into three categories:

- formal
- informal
- peer

A formal observation is annual, arranged with prior notice, and assessed against a series of standards. Figure 7.1 illustrates the process.



*Figure 7.1: School D formal observation process*

Another complication concerns the observation form. The teachers knew that such a form existed, and, as was the case in the past academic year, it was emailed to them, e.g. ST2. They also knew that the form contains two sections, one of which is used by the teachers for self-evaluation prior to the observation, e.g. ST3. However, the HoD did not seem to be cognizant of such details, and all she chose to say was that 'there is a massive document online somewhere'. This 'massive' document is a three-page 'appraisal form', which has nine sections, as illustrated in table 7.4.

Sections	Focus
1	Teaching
2	Preparation
3	Motivation
4	Deadlines
5	Marking
6	Assessments
7	Use of ICT
8	Classroom environment
9	Involvement in school co-curricular activities (CCAs)

*Table 7.4: School D formal observation form*

As noted earlier, the HoD job description contains three sections (see table 7.2). Under 'tasks', there are nine clauses. Clause (f) states that the HoD is expected to 'ensure appropriate policies and strategies are properly followed by the teachers'. The evidence from this department indicates the opposite. According to the teachers, they all attended a one-month induction programme. They knew that a handbook existed, although they hardly referred to it. Conversely, the HoD denied that she had a job description, and that a staff handbook existed. The HoS, in his interview, explained this discrepancy thus: 'We had some local staff who had the induction process for a month, and we had the expat staff who had no induction procedure whatsoever'. This practice, however, contradicts clause (f), as noted above.

Another category, under 'lesson observations', deals with informal visits to lessons. They 'can happen any time ... and can lead to the need for formal observations'. As disclosed during the interviews with the teachers, e.g. ST2, the informal observations were unannounced, although the HoD claimed that she had informed the teachers for those she had recently conducted. Recalling the tight teaching schedule, the HoD explained how she had to ask

the HoS to cover a lesson for her so that she could visit two lessons. This claim was subsequently corroborated by the HoS. The document permits this practice. Concerning peer observation, as the third category under lesson observations, the document states thus: 'If you would like to observe a colleague teaching, please liaise with them, and if you need to have relief for your lesson, discuss with your leader'. Although the HoS's action was not meant for peer observation, his attention can be linked to this section of the document.

School D's documents hold peer observation in high regard as it describes it as 'an important part of sharing good practice'. However, the interview data revealed that the heavy teaching load has affected this practice. What the teachers shared in their interviews were related to their activities in the past academic year, which indicates inter-departmental visits to Mandarin, for example (ST2). Similarly, there are few indications of CPD programmes. The participants spoke about the Friday afternoon's training sessions, which this researcher was permitted to attend on one occasion. The agenda was exactly the one that would later be discussed and elaborated at department level. This session was led by the HoS in one of the science labs. A striking feature of it involved inter-departmental seating arrangements whereby, at each of the seven tables, seven teachers of different departments were located. This was the only occasion during the field work when the secondary school was seen in one room.

Contrary to the consistent emphases on the instructional roles and responsibilities of the HoD, there is limited evidence of a coherent understanding of the processes in the department.

### Leadership involvement

According to the document, the overarching statement about the HoDs' responsibilities acknowledges that 'the department head of subject' is also 'a subject teacher'. This expectation is in line with the instructional roles and responsibilities of the HoD. There is no indication of broad-based leadership involvement in the department. All the examples that the participants provide are linked to teaching and learning. For example, the HoD claimed that the teachers had almost full autonomy for 'book week [and] school trips'. Other opportunities include 'scheme of work' (ST1), 'curriculum overviews' (ST2), and 'a trip to Singapore' (ST3). There was limited evidence of dissatisfaction with this level of leadership engagement. ST2, for example, said:

So far I'm comfortable with what I have right now. With the packed schedule, the duty is very heavy. Right now we have duties during breaks; that's so much to think of.

'Duties' occupies a specific section in the document. They are assigned by the HoS, and serve to fulfil the school's 'commitment to health and safety' of the students. This section ends with a reminder that 'duties are not optional'. There were also some reservations about autonomy within the department. ST3 preferred to consult her HoD because of her 'ideas', 'experience', and 'knowledge', and because she thought it was 'the right way to do'. ST1 chose to make a distinction between serious and less serious matters:

Like for the activities, [e.g. book week and trips], we can actually decide and implement, but things like the budget or coming up with the banner [for the activities], we have

to check with the marketing team, or get the principal's approval.

Similarly, the HoD added:

If I want to rethink the scheme of work per forma and what's included on it ... I don't want to say to my team that I've decided we're going to do this ... and then two, three, [or] four months down the line senior management say this is the new per forma we're using, and I've just made them do the job twice. So that's the other reason I'm holding back.

According to the interview data, the extent of the participants' involvement in leading their school was extremely limited, however, the HoD had some aspirations for her career path in this school:

I'm not interested in pastoral work; I don't want to become the head of year, or anything like that ... ideally I would like to be the head of teaching and learning.

The HoS's remark about the scope of the HoDs' involvement at school level suggests a 'build-up' approach, which, broadly speaking, reconciles with the English HoD's expectations:

We are a new school. In the beginning [of the academic year], it was important that a leadership environment was strong. Clear decisions were made. However, we are now moving to the place where it now needs to be owned by many people.

Given these unfolding developments, all the teachers had a high regard for their HoD's knowledge. However, they chose to distinguish between the matters for which she could make decisions such as the 'syllabus' (ST1) and the 'curriculum

overviews' (ST2); in contrast, she would need to consult the SLT for budgeting (ST1), or moving dates already in the school calendar, e.g. the book week (ST2). The HoD herself was critical of the school's bureaucracy: 'For things I really want lots, but there are annoying bits of bureaucracy here where you don't have autonomy'. Contrary to all these remarks, ST3 chose to make this comment: 'She's the lady boss; [name withheld] is much a boss of her own'.

Generally, all the teachers expressed satisfaction with the leadership of the department, although the HoD thought it was 'too early to call'. Similarly, the HoS pinned his assessment to time:

English is managed well, but still I haven't made my complete mind up because I need more evidence to make a decision. But I trust her, and that's what's important. I think she needs to feel trusted, and I trust her.

Feelings about the school leadership were mixed. Except for ST3, who 'love[s] working in this school [because] it's more organised', ST1 had concerns about her non-Malaysian leaders' lenient approach to student discipline. On a similar note, but from a different perspective, ST2 was critical of the school's 'follow the book' approach to staff dismissal time, for example.

All the participants evaluated their performance as effective within the classroom and department, but frustrated 'when little things don't happen' (HoD), 'at school level' (ST1), about the 'packed timetable' (ST2), and with the Human Resources department 'because they have no idea what we [i.e. the teachers] are doing' (ST3). Despite the physical distance of the HoS's office from the

English department, his evaluation tends to be consistent with the HoD's assessment:

The English HoD is frustrated. I think she feels lack of autonomy. She's still new; she doesn't know where the lines are. My task is to raise it to effectiveness.

### **Maths Department**

The maths department comprises three Malaysian teachers, led by an HoD who is also Malaysian. The HoD joined the school in 2014 as a subject teacher, but was promoted to lead the department for the 2015/2016 academic year. Two of the teachers have the same length of service as the HoD, but ST2 joined the school in 2015.

All the participants agreed to attend separate interviews. Recalling the physical structure of School D, the maths participants were observed to be the only practitioners who would convene, although intermittently, around a table in the staffroom. The classrooms are on Level 5 (see table 7.1). Observation time was split between these two locations to capture interactions and the nature of talks. Sections of the documents pertinent to the maths department were also examined.

### Roles

The role of the HoD in the maths department tends to be understood in its traditional sense as a conduit between the management and the teachers:

I think that's my role to pass messages. As teachers, we don't really get a need to talk to the top management all the time. We don't have a spokesperson so we need somebody to be a representative. (HoD)



There are some key words in the HoD's definition that find resonance with the subject teachers. ST2 thinks that the role involves 'taking care of the teachers [to] make sure they carry out the daily ... weekly ... [and] mid-term plans'. ST3's conception is consistent with the HoD's 'spokesperson' notion as he 'see[s] the ... role like a leader for our department to represent the school'. ST1 chose to divide the role into 'narrow' and 'ideal'. From the former perspective, the HoD is seen as 'a bridge between the top management and the teachers to convey any messages and information'; this perception agrees with the HoD's view. The 'ideal' version would regard the HoD as 'a leader [to] lead the team to make something great'. On further enquiry, ST1 chose to define his HoD as fitting the 'narrow' view. The rationale behind this selective role conception can be explained and understood against the context the HoS described the role:

What's important for me is that the head of department needs to have the necessary skills [and] experience ... but ... the role is a management role, it's a leadership role. There are times when they need to mentor ... to lead ... to teach and listen. So that role itself has a lot of scope.

The overall view of the HoD role in the maths department, and at the school level, seems to suggest that it encompasses diverse aspects, contingent upon contextual needs and considerations.

### Responsibilities

As noted earlier, the HoD job description has a specific section about responsibilities (see table 7.3). It also has a section that deals with the HoD's tasks (see section 3, table 7.2). There are nine clauses under 'tasks'. Table 7.5 shows an outline of these:

Clauses	Focus
a	Attend curriculum meetings
b	Maintain schemes of work
c	Check exercise books
d	Support underperforming teachers
e	Observe lessons
f	Policies followed by teachers
g	Monitor students' progress
h	Discuss students' progress with other teachers
i	Counsel underperforming students

*Table 7.5: HoD tasks*

There are some overlaps between the HoD responsibilities and the tasks (compare tables 7.3 and 7.5). The focus on teaching and learning in both sections is evident.

#### Role relationships

The interview data indicate that the HoD enjoys a very good relationship with the teachers. ST3, for example, praises his leader for being dependable and helpful. In return, the HoD spoke in an admiring tone about her teachers:

So far they've been very supportive. They take things very positively ... I don't like to give instructions. I'd like to hear from them and take suggestions. Yes, so far I've had excellent relationships.

The maths department did not have a leader in the previous academic year. The HoD's promotion enabled the teachers to compare the current state of their department with the way it was last year. ST1 and ST3 spoke favourably about the positive impact of this change, especially for the latter, as he had experienced some difficulties in his relationship with the principal:

Our work is more organised compared to last year ... [and] we are more secure. Last year, I had some problems with

the principal, which led to some misunderstandings between us.

During this study, the maths practitioners were seen as the only department to convene at KS3 staffroom (see table 7.1). ST1 explains the rationale thus:

It just happens that the three of us [ST1, ST3 & the HoD] joined the school together last year. So it happened that we occupied the same place. That's the only reason.

ST3 was highly critical of the staffroom space:

The staffroom is very congested. If I want to rate it from 0-10, I would rate it zero because it's not convenient; [there's] no privacy.

Despite these structural complications, the participants enjoyed a strong rapport. This researcher was permitted to attend a departmental meeting. Its key focus was an extended exploration of a staff training programme held earlier. The main agenda consisted of topics similar to those of the English department. The atmosphere of the meeting could be described as warm and friendly.

In addition to a positive relationship with the teachers, the HoD was on favourable terms with the HoS:

Professional wise, I think the head of secondary is very supportive ... I have a very good relationship with [name withheld]. So far everything is good because there is somebody who is willing to listen.

As the interview data show, the HoS is pleased with his relationship with the maths HoD. Complementing his comments

about the process and rationale behind appointing the HoD as the leader of the maths department, he said:

... What we chose was probably an interesting choice ... she has less experience with the IGCSE, but her enthusiasm, her organisation, her management, and the way she looks at the systems within the department is very clear ... There are some difficulties within the department, but she's managing them very well.

In contrast to diverse conceptions of the HoD role and responsibilities, there seems to be more consistency in views about role relationships.

#### Instructional engagement

As noted earlier, the document places great emphasis on the importance of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. There are several clauses under 'responsibilities' and 'tasks' (see tables 7.3 & 7.5), which deal with lesson observations; these can be divided into two groups; teacher-related and student-related. Two examples of teacher-related clauses are as follows:

To assist in the observation of subject teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of the subjects he/she is in charge of. (Clause 2, under 'responsibilities', see table 7.3).

Support teachers who are not performing as expected [through] discussion, counselling and setting targets, as well as submitting periodic reports on the overall performance of the teachers ... (Clause (d), under 'tasks', see table 7.5)

There are also some clauses that involve students. The selected examples that follow illustrate the scope:

To implement and supervise an effective system to check students' written work, and feedback strengths and weaknesses to teachers. (Clause 4, under 'responsibilities', see table 7.3)

Counsel students who are not performing, or are facing difficulties in their studies. (Clause (i), under 'tasks', see table 7.5)

These clauses demonstrate the importance of instructional quality at School D. The interview data point to a coherent understanding about the observation process, which is displayed in figure 7.1. However, some inconsistencies can be detected concerning the observation form (see table 7.4). While the HoD and ST1 were aware of the observation form, ST2 and ST3 stated the opposite. This contrasts with claims of induction programmes for the full length of a month made by all the participants.

In addition, there were some criticisms about the function of lesson observations. Describing feedback sessions as 'partly' useful, ST1 added:

Because of the time limit when the head of department is in the classroom [for] maximum 45 minutes, there are many things that are missed out of the 45 minutes that she cannot observe.

Concerns about lesson observations also extended to the intentions behind them. ST3 seemed most sceptical:

[It's about] renewal [of] contracts and bonus because I particularly believe that when the head of department comes and interviews us, it is all about our appraisal. I don't think it's for improving our lessons.

ST3's concern is echoed by the HoD. While explaining the observation process, she linked the purpose of the second formal observation to appraisal, promotion and financial bonuses. A specific section of the document is allocated to 'appraisal', and is defined in these terms: 'The appraisal process is an annual process. The process is multifaceted and should start at the beginning of the year'. It is divided into four sections:

- self-review
- line manager review
- lesson observation
- performance discussion

As revealed through the interviews and the documentary analysis, School D has a strong tendency towards a line management system. While elaborating on the leadership role of the HoDs, the HoS chose to view it through the line management lens:

Although I have the open door policy ..., it's also important to understand the line management system. I don't want teachers to come above the HoD to me with their issues.

Part of this could be understood by the responsibility this private school feels towards its customers, i.e. the parents. The term 'parents' is mentioned in several parts of the document. Under 'class tutor', homeroom teachers are expected to 'receive any notes or letters from parents', and 'monitor parental enquiries/comments and ensure they are followed up'. Under the same section, the homeroom teachers are expected to 'sign the planner weekly to review what the students/parents are writing', and 'take actions requested by parents within 48 hours'. Among the documents, there is a job description document for the teachers with five sections:

Sections	Focus
1	Purpose
2	Teaching
3	Professional review and development
4	Pastoral duties
5	General professional duties

*Table 7.6: School D teachers' job description sections*

Under 'purpose' and 'general professional duties', the role of parents is highlighted:

Seek to work in partnership with parents, respecting their views, and promoting understanding and cooperation to support the young person's learning and wellbeing in and out of school.

Communicate and consult with the parents of her/his students, or others who have a legitimate interest in the students in her/his classes.

The interview with the HoS highlighted his instructional role, and the degree of importance he tends to attach to quality teaching and learning. When probed about whether or not he has personally made lesson observations, he said:

Yes, I've done that on a number of occasions. It's important because I feel there are some teachers who have limited experience ... Therefore, it has an impact on learning ... on progress [and] on what students go home and communicate to parents.

This comment, combined with the sections in the document, suggests a connection between the quality of teaching and learning, and parents. In contrast to this perceived priority, little evidence emerged about peer observation mainly due to heavy teaching loads and/or clashing teaching periods. Similarly, very few CPD opportunities were reported except perhaps for the HoD

who was on a self-study programme on formative/summative assessments, and classroom management.

### Leadership involvement

There is very limited evidence of broad-based departmental leadership roles. What has emerged is mainly linked to teaching and learning. The HoD, however, spoke about some opportunities, which are still linked to instruction:

We want to build some sort of leadership in our teachers. What I did this year [was that] I told [ST3] he would be in charge of Year 8 curriculum. He planned the curriculum for the whole team. When we have the departmental meeting, he comes and explains to us how things should be taught in Year 8, and I give authority to [ST1] to make decisions for Year 9, but he will come and report to me; he will tell me how things are done, but he has the authority to decide how things should be taught.

There is no section in the document to address the nature of the relationship between the HoDs and the teachers. The final three lines raise the question about the extent of the teachers' autonomy in carrying out this 'delegated' responsibility. The HoD said:

If something doesn't work, I will personally email [ST1], and ask for his feedback. But the thing is it's his work; I don't think I have any right to just go in, and change things as I like. I'll just speak to him first, and ask him about the reason for him to do it that way. If his reason is valid, and I find it correct, then why not just leave it that way; if not, I will suggest to him, and I'll make him make the changes.

Not all the teachers were dissatisfied with the extent of their current leadership role. ST1, for example, seemed pleased and



optimistic: 'Right now by looking at the timetable, I prefer to stay where I am now. But of course if there is an opportunity, I'm willing to take up the responsibility'.

Remarks about the extent of autonomy within the department revolved around teaching and learning activities. The HoD claimed that she had '100% autonomy to take decisions' about matters linked to 'exams', e.g. 'how they should look like'. However, she had mixed autonomy about the timetabling: 'For timetabling I can suggest which teacher is suitable for which year group – that's it; not the number of teaching periods; not the workload'. Similar remarks were made by the teachers. For example, ST2 said:

Not much ... my freedom is limited to the classroom, [and] how I teach my students ... I'm free to choose any strategies, but then we have this scheme of work where we have to follow the pace.

I don't say that I have full freedom to take a decision, and I don't say I don't have any freedom to take a decision. It depends on the situations, but most of [the time] we have to follow the decisions. (ST3)

The maths HoD was the only participating practitioner who had been promoted to lead her department. This was a useful opportunity to explore the process of her appointment. According to the HoD, the Key Stage leader announced the vacancy to all the maths teachers in a meeting; these included ST1, ST3 and the current HoD. However, ST3 provides a conflicting version of the events. He claimed that the Key Stage leader had never personally talked to him, and that he never received any application, which caused him to feel unhappy: 'I was like a bit sad because why they didn't just send me the application ... at least they could

approach me'. According to ST1, the interview consisted of two stages; an interview with the principal, and one with the HoS. The HoD added that the position was both externally and internally advertised, which led to the appointment of the incumbent. This is what she said about her appointment:

One and a half months later [the principal] called me and said he wanted me for this position ... the only thing he said was my passion for teaching, and he said he could see that I have a good relationship with my department teachers.

In his interview, the HoS confirmed these comments, and added:

We had an interview process for internal and external candidates, and we found out that our internal candidate was our best choice.

Although middle leadership represents a whole-school leadership role, the interview data reveal that the scope of this role has largely remained confined to instructional responsibilities: 'I'm doing my duty as a homeroom teacher ... but mainly it's about managing the team' (HoD). The HoD added how she had managed to reduce the teaching hours of ST3, however, when asked about having the power to set policies, she said:

As a head of department, I don't think I have a say on that. The head of secondary would have a say on that ... the thing is we only knew what levels we are teaching in the first week of the school – that was three days before our class. All I could say to my head of secondary [was that] this teacher is more suitable for this year group. That was my boundary.

The extent of the teachers' leadership role was limited to 'class teacher' (ST1), 'duties' (ST2) and 'maths assembly' (ST3).

Similarly, the extent of their autonomy was limited. Despite these reservations, all the teachers were pleased with the manner in which the department was led. Generally, they described their HoD as a knowledgeable leader; as for her autonomy, they chose to make distinctions, which highlighted the role of the parents again, as in ST1's comment below:

Because she's new so I think that the top management is also monitoring her to ensure that she follows the school policy. For the time being, I don't see much autonomy for her – it depends on the type of issues; some issues of course she can decide. When it comes to the timetable, and it involves parents, then she has to refer to our head of secondary.

Most of the participants regarded the school leadership as effective, except for ST3 who was critical of his colleagues beyond his department:

There's no connection between departments and the non-academic departments; they are not supportive such as the ICT department. I don't think the principal's management is effective. He doesn't make the staff happy. All he wants is that you do [your job] because parents are paying.

ST2 was the only participant who felt effective within and outside his department. While ST3 felt equally effective within the department, he said he was frustrated with the manner the school leadership handled the teachers' suggestions. Although ST1 had earlier spoken about his positive relationship with his HoD, his remark about his performance revealed some implicit uneasiness. He reported that he felt somewhat disappointed: 'It's just some plans that I'm not able to carry out; some plans within the

department ... teaching and learning plans'. The HoD chose to locate herself on the borderline between effectiveness and frustration. She explained her choice thus:

The school has given us the opportunity to voice out [our concerns]. There are certain things they listen to, but there are certain things about teaching that they don't.

The HoS assessed the HoD's leadership thus:

I would say I trust her, but I think she also needs more support because she's new to the role. So it's managed well, but I encourage more communication.

Despite the HoS's physical distance, there are great similarities between his assessment of the HoD's performance and the one provided by the HoD herself:

Maths is in the greyest area because there are times when she is frustrated [or] effective. There are a lot of issues that she has, and that's not so easy; and where she is on the line, I think she's effective not as effective as everybody needs to be, but where she is – under the circumstances. (HoS)

### **Science Department**

The science department comprises four practitioners. There are three Malaysian teachers led by an HoD, who is not Malaysian. The HoD has been in this school since it opened, and as such, can be considered as the longest serving department head, experiencing her first leadership role outside her native country. The teachers, in contrast, are new to the international school setting and, therefore, have less experience than their leader.

All the participants agreed to attend separate interviews, which took place in the science labs. Interactions between the science participants were most difficult to observe, not least because the labs are located at different levels. The researcher decided to spend slightly more time around the HoD's lab, and on occasions of interviews with the teachers, this balance was reversed in favour of the teachers. Useful sections of documents related to the science department were also scrutinised.

### Roles

The interpretation that the HoD provides of her role is consistent with the importance that the document tends to attach to quality teaching and learning:

It's to basically look after the curriculum of science to ensure that science is being delivered in a coherent and decent way.

The teachers' understanding, though, seems to be affected by the scope of their experience. ST1's definition agrees with her HoD's, as she sees the role to involve 'monitoring and giving feedback for improvement'. ST2 and ST3, however, tend to focus on the characteristics of an HoD:

[A] head of department ... assists you [in] almost everything because, for the new teachers, the head of department is very important. She's the first person I can trust. After coming to this school, I found out [that] my HoD is very hardworking. I respect her very much. (ST2)

The head of department should be mature ... very professional, and ... very experienced. My head of department is very experienced. She's doing a great job, and she's supervising us in [a] very good manner. (ST3)

It seems that the teachers tend to use the visible features of their HoD's activities in the department to interpret her role.

### Responsibilities

The HoD has multiple responsibilities in the department, and these are stipulated in the document (see table 7.3). However, while acknowledging the significance of the position, most of the teachers chose to narrow the scope down to that of a facilitator:

I think [it] is important because we need to be guided in terms of what we do. Also, there's a need among all the teachers to have a standardised manner of teaching, and I think she provides that for us. (ST1)

It's really important. Without a head of department, I think our work will not be polished, or standardised. (ST3)

There is no section in the document to show that the responsibility of the HoD is to standardise work across the department or the school. However, it seems that the noticeable aspects of the HoD's work continue to be taken to be her (main) responsibilities.

### Role relationships

From the interview data, it emerged that the HoS has a distinctive relationship with the science HoD. The HoS said:

The science HoD has done a fantastic job. She is leading [the department] in the right direction; definitely she's experienced [and] knowledgeable, and she's got great vision.

The HoD's assessment of her relationship with the HoS was less passionate:

There's very much an open door policy here. [The HoS] can come in any time he wants to pass on some information, or he wants my opinion about something, and I feel like that I can just walk into his office.

During the study, the HoS was observed to approach the science HoD more than the other participating departments. In the only meeting, which served to train the secondary staff, the HoS and the HoD appeared to establish a good rapport.

As the interview data reveal, the relationships between the HoD and the teachers entail subtleties. Two of the science teachers, ST2 and ST3, are having their first experience in an international school:

I have a couple that need an awful lot of support at the moment because they're not very experienced ... they come from [a] local school setting to [an] international school setting but I have very high expectations.

This matter tends to have disrupted the balance of power between these two teachers and the HoD. This became evident in the usage of the word 'boss', which was used by the HoD and ST2 and ST3. In response to a question about departmental relationships, the HoD said:

I'd like to think it's pretty good. I'd like to think we have a pretty good team. As the boss, it's always hard to tell, but yeah, I think we have a pretty good team.

ST2's view of her relationship with the HoD was described as 'employee' and 'boss': 'Since I am new, she's like a boss, and I'm like an employee'. ST3 related a similar experience.

In one departmental meeting that this researcher was permitted to attend, the relationship was observed to be representative of trainer-trainee. These comments tend to suggest an implicit link between the scope of experience and the quality of relationships. After all, all the teachers were generally pleased with their HoD, e.g. ST1: 'She's a very nice person'.

### Instructional engagement

There is great consistency among the participants in the science department. The process described by each practitioner fits the outline displayed in figure 7.1. According to the interview data, both formal and informal observation forms have been carried out:

I do one formal observation myself; I do half term, which they get feedback from. I also do drop-ins for 10 minutes of their lessons. (HoD)

The HoD also made some remarks about the feedback:

I watch the lesson, then I write up supportive feedback. I try to stay away from negatives; I try to focus on positives. I would then give ideas in the same way that you would train a teacher ... and then we sit down and then we go through their written feedback. Probably it takes half an hour, and we discuss ideas and strategies.

The interview data from the teachers largely confirm the HoD's claim:

In the next department meeting, she informed everybody about the positive things from my lesson. She usually will not discuss the negative things. (ST3)



Remarks from ST2 threw more light on possible negative aspects observed: 'If she finds something in the lesson that she doesn't like, she will call me, and talk privately'. Comments of this sort highlight the role of peer observation. The interview data show that this is done systematically in the science department:

We do learning buddies. I have certain teachers match to certain teachers – critical friends we call them, and they can go in and observe each other. I'll do that once every half term, so they get one observation from their peers, and they have to do one observation of that peer, and we all get together after we've done it, and we say one positive thing that we got out of the lesson. (HoD)

After probing, the HoD explained how she would arrange the visits:

They know their teaching buddies. I arrange the partners because I go by the strength of my staff ... so I pair them together so they're not necessarily observed by the same person they observe.

Comments from the teachers confirm these statements, e.g. ST1:

[The HoD] will arrange this ... she will arrange who will be observing whom, and then we have to discuss among ourselves when is the right time for us to go and observe each other.

ST2 also added that she had observed the HoD's lesson. Some evidence about the CPD programmes emerged from this department, which ranged from IGCSE courses to a visit by a trainer from the US. Unlike the HoD, the teachers had attended a one-month induction programme.

### Leadership involvement

There is little evidence of broad-based leadership at departmental level. Responsibilities are usually linked to teaching and learning, such as 'preparing question papers' (ST1), and 'co-curricular activities' (ST3). ST2 denied any involvement outside teaching. The HoD justified this thus: 'I'd love to give them more, but I've got two teachers who are falling apart just on their timetable'. Despite this, her vision for widening the leadership radius barely goes beyond instruction-based tasks:

I think that if we get another teacher, and reduce their timetable a little bit, we can start looking at things like running some trips, or getting the science club up and running.

Conversely, all the teachers claimed that they enjoyed great freedom to teach the way they like; however, as the interview data suggest, its extent is manipulated by the HoD: 'We have the freedom to teach, but she [i.e. the HoD] will occasionally come and observe if there's anything that she needs us to improve' (ST1); 'Yes, she gives me all the freedom I need, but she still gives me some guidelines' (ST2). The HoD explained her approach by making comparisons between autonomy for teachers at this school and in her country:

I think I've given them less autonomy than I would do teachers at home because they kind of come from government schools; they don't know how it works, and so the way I see them at the moment, are like they are trainee teachers at home, so you wouldn't give trainee teachers a whole heap of autonomy. I put policies in place, and I monitor that they are adhering to those policies.

Comparing her current freedom of action with what she had in the past, she seemed pleased with her degree of autonomy:

I think I have quite a bit of autonomy actually. I think more so than I've ever had in any other school before. I love that.

Further examination, however, revealed a distinction between autonomy for 'small' and 'big' matters:

If I want to make a small change within just my department, it doesn't affect anywhere else in the school, I feel that I'm quite able to do that. I don't have to justify that to anybody. Whereas, if I want to make a big change to the department, that it would perhaps have an effect on the school, then I would share that. (HoD)

Similarly, there are very few indications of whole-school involvement. The HoD rejected any involvement, 'Not really – not other than science'. The examples that the teachers provided were still linked to students such as 'debate club' (ST1), and 'duties in the canteen' (ST2). ST3 would not contemplate further involvement beyond her current workload:

So far no because my timetable is packed Monday to Friday. I'm really tired. I feel that Saturday [and] Sunday is my time to rest. I don't want to spare anything for the school any more.

To answer the question about the extent of whole-school autonomy, the HoD and the HoS made similar comments – a distinction between middle leadership and school senior leadership:

The role of the middle manager is to support the senior leader in implementing their decision ... if you want to break into senior management, and you want decisions whole school, then you get a job that requires that, and that's my next career step ... if everybody's starting to create a vision for the school, then you have many different visions, and nothing will ever get done ... What you don't want is everybody scattering in different directions ... I don't think that's helpful at all. (HoD)

I believe in them feeling supported. They also need strong leadership, and the decision needs to be clear, coming from a position of authority because that gives it the stamp, the approval, that gives it 'we stand by this', which is important for all the departments to recognise. (HoS)

All the teachers approved of their HoD's knowledge of the subject matter. Interestingly, in a unanimous voice, all the participants divided their leader's autonomy into department-based matters, with great autonomy, and school-based matters, with limited leeway. All the teachers expressed satisfaction with the management, and the organisation of the science department. The leadership of the school, in contrast, did not receive a similar rating. The HoD expressed scepticism as whether the senior leadership had a clear vision for the future development of the school. While ST1 chose to criticise the HoS for ignoring suggestions, as for the conduct of the assemblies, ST2 and ST3 both complained about the HoS's timetabling policy and heavy workloads.

In assessing their performance, all the participants rated themselves as effective except perhaps for ST2 who felt effective for Key Stage 3 classes, and less so for IGCSE classes, as this required collaboration with the HoD. None of the teachers

expressed frustration, but the HoD was frustrated when her approved plans for the design of the labs were overturned down the line:

The principal said, 'Well, we're part of a corporation. I was told from above that we couldn't do it'. And that makes me very frustrated, that fundamentally, the big decisions about schools are made by non-teachers [but] businessmen.

### **Overview**

This study at School D provides a useful opportunity to examine middle leadership in a newly established international school. In its second year of operation, School D has HoDs with varying profiles. The science department is led by a leader who was recruited as such from the beginning. This contrasts with the maths leader who also joined this school from the beginning, but, as a teacher, who was subsequently promoted to lead her department. The English HoD has elements of both in that, similar to the science HoD, she was employed as a leader at exactly the same time as the maths HoD. This sheds a useful light on the manner in which core departments have been established and are growing in School D, which appears to be incoherent and non-systematic.

Of all the leaders interviewed, including the HoS, the science HoD has the longest tenure; both the English and the maths leaders have the same length of service as the HoS. Figure 7.2 provides an overview of these tenures.

2014/2015	2015/2016
Science HoD tenure	
Maths teacher tenure	Maths HoD tenure
	English HoD tenure
	HoS tenure

*Figure 7.2: School D leaders' tenure overview*

This composition has implications for the leadership of this school. The positive relationship between the science HoD and the HoS can be understood in the context of the support and advice the former is able to provide to the latter due to her familiarity with the school's structure and processes from the beginning. This was evident from the frequent visits the HoS made to the science lab. Although both the English and the maths HoDs joined the leadership team at the same time, the advantage of the latter for the HoS is her familiarity with the local context. This can be deduced from the positive comment the HoS made about the HoD's effective handling of conflicts in an all-locally staffed department. The interview data, and the field observations, indicate an open and a relatively open relationship between the HoS and the science and maths HoDs respectively. What they also suggest is that the HoS has chosen to have a more cautious relationship with the English HoD.

The most powerful feature of School D, evident from the interviews, observations, and documentary analysis, is its over-emphasis on instruction so that all the other aspects of school leadership are either aligned along this, or have been affected by it. The picture that School D portrays is 'tight-fitting' middle

leadership where the 'tyranny' of the heavy timetable leaves barely any room for extensive leadership exercise, either by the HoDs or the teachers. This limited opportunity may be a blessing in disguise as it leaves everyone focused on instruction, and tends to minimise the possibility of conflicts which may arise from having to deal with other adults. The evidence from School D suggests that the practitioners in these three departments largely cohere, and, given the scant departmental complaints, e.g. maths ST1 and science ST2, most of the criticisms voiced by the English HoD, ST1, ST2 & ST3, maths ST3, and science HoD, ST1, ST2 & ST3 are directed towards people outside their subject-specific boundary.

There appears to be an interplay between the 'age' of the school and school leadership. At this 'young' stage, teaching and learning has been accorded great importance. This priority has resulted in widespread job satisfaction. Conversely, the feeling of powerlessness in dealing with matters outside instruction has caused some dissatisfaction. This implies a zero-sum equation whereby the further one moves away from the classroom, the higher the level of frustration, and vice versa.

## **Chapter Eight: Analysis and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This thesis examines middle leadership in four international secondary schools in Malaysia. The embedded multiple case-study method enabled the exploration of five themes:

- Roles
- Responsibilities
- Role relationships
- Instructional engagement, and
- Leadership involvement

The case-study chapters, 4-7, rely on 'first-level' (Tracy, 2013) coding, which is largely 'descriptive' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) with 'little or no' requirement for going beyond the data (Punch, 2009). This chapter analyses the data via 'second-level' (Tracy, 2013) coding, which is 'analytical' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), and involves 'inference beyond the data ... [and] ... focus on pattern codes' (Punch, 2009:176). An important feature of this chapter, enabled by the four case studies, is the possibility of cross-sectional and comparative analyses. While the former strategy permits examining similarities, the latter allows discussing the differences (Bryman, 2008). The next section is a discussion of IL.

### **Instructional Leadership**

The overarching themes guiding the examination of instructional leadership (IL) in this thesis are derived from three studies carried out by Hallinger & Murphy (1985), Blasé & Blasé (2002) and Southworth (2002). These themes include lesson observation, peer observation and CPD. During the interviews, each of these



themes was explored, and further divided into sub-themes. Table 8.1 displays the overview of these.

Lesson observation	Peer observation	CPD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Types</li> <li>➤ Procedures</li> <li>➤ Feedback</li> <li>➤ Criticisms</li> <li>➤ Alternative methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Within-department</li> <li>➤ Inter-department</li> <li>➤ Modelling</li> <li>➤ Barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Internal</li> <li>➤ External</li> </ul>

Table 8.1: IL themes and sub-themes

Also, during the initial interviews, some additional themes began to emerge, which were followed up in the subsequent conversations. Table 8.2 introduces these.

Emergent themes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Role of parents</li> <li>➤ Showcase lessons</li> <li>➤ Missing details</li> <li>➤ Meeting agendas</li> <li>➤ Documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Induction</li> <li>➤ Absenteeism</li> <li>➤ Peer observation types</li> <li>➤ Peer observation barriers</li> <li>➤ CPD variations</li> </ul>

Table 8.2: IL emergent themes

Some of these themes are unique to one school, with some themes shared among two or three. Notwithstanding these variations, the strong message that emerges from these data is that the focus on teaching and learning is found to be the most powerful feature of all the schools; powerful in the sense that, given inconsistencies in practice, instruction is taken most seriously.

Lesson observations

When compared to the existing empirical literature, the general picture about lesson observations provides mixed messages. In

contrast to the concerns expressed by Ofsted (1996, 1997 & 2015), and Bush (2003a), the notion of lesson observation in the schools is found to be the least contentious area, but with variations in terms of development, which is consistent with Metcalfe & Russell's (1997) finding in England. According to the documentary analysis, monitoring in schools A and D has received relatively sufficient attention, an area that has largely remained less developed at schools B and C, a distinction that largely recalls Lai & Cheung's (2013) description of high-/low-implementation-level schools in Hong Kong. Contrary to the findings by Hannay & Denby (1994), Metcalfe & Russell (1997), Bullock (1988), Earley & Fletcher-Campbell (1989), Garrett et al (1999), Wise (2001), Ghamrawi (2010) and Kaparou & Bush (2015), the participating teachers accept their HoDs' monitoring roles with little resistance, and tend to view them as a common feature of their job descriptions, a finding that resonates considerably with Busher's (2005:144) UK-based study; 'The teachers in the departments seemed to accept this surveillance as a legitimate part of the middle leaders' work'. As for the HoDs themselves, there are no indications that they shun this responsibility, as reported by Weller (2001) and Thorpe & Bennett-Powell (2014).

This positive shift in attitudes (e.g. Wise & Bush, 1999; Adey, 2000; Wise, 2001) is by no means absolute. Critical views about lesson observations have not disappeared, but have been transformed in nature. These can generally be divided into two categories; aim and manner.

### *Lesson observations: aim and manner*

There are concerns about the goals of lesson observations. In all the schools, there are sceptical voices that choose to link the monitoring of teaching to appraisal, which can potentially have implications for contract renewals and/or the allocation of financial incentives. This finding is consistent with those of Hannay & Denby (1994), Metcalfe & Russell (1997), Wise (2001), Ghamrawi (2010) and Kaparou & Bush (2015) where observers are seen as “spies”, performing duties which are described as ‘risky’ and referred to as ‘surveillance’. This understanding may serve to validate Wise & Bush’s (1999) remark which connects shifts in observational attitudes to externally mandated accountability mechanisms, such as those defined and expected by the Ofsted in the UK where these authors conducted their research. In the context of private international schools, this ‘pressure’ is exerted by parents. As the interview data in all the schools show, parents emerge as a powerful force in driving the need for instructional monitoring.

Another area of concern relates to the manner in which lesson observations are conducted. The interview data suggest that some teachers have reservations about showcase lessons, as well as observers’ attention to details, at the expense of losing sight of lessons in their entirety. These criticisms are most evident at school A and, to a lesser degree, at school C. School A, as the documentary analysis shows, has the best developed documentation for its instructional observations, followed by schools D and C. Criticisms from two teachers at these schools, schools A and C, with relatively strong documentary records, tend to suggest a link between school/departmental documentation and an implicit feeling of resentment. The role of the document

lies in its use of language to clarify the rewards and penalties for effective and less effective lessons respectively. For an HoD to miss the details of a lesson is taken as a serious matter that can potentially jeopardise the professional profile of a teacher.

The issue of showcase lessons brings to the fore the possibility of 'injustice' perceived in distributing these rewards and penalties in that the more competent, experienced and committed teachers tend to resent the fact that teachers of less calibre may (equally) reap the benefits of a lesson explicitly evaluated as 'successful', but implicitly conducted as a 'show'. The issue of showcase lessons emanates from the manner in which lesson observations are carried out in the case-study schools.

#### *Lesson observations: formal and informal*

Both schools A and D practise two types of monitoring methods; formal and informal. The former is scheduled, announced and linked to performance management, and echoes the systems and mechanisms described by Glover et al (1998) and Turner (2000). The latter, a.k.a. 'learning walks' at school A, is an ongoing 'drop-in' practice. This informal type pursues two objectives. First, it creates opportunities for inter-departmental observation and learning. Second, it could potentially serve as an antidote to showcase lessons, as it is exercised on the basis of surprise visits. The observation mechanisms are different at schools B and C, where only formal observations are conducted, with surprise visits practised at school B to capture 'genuine' practice. A unique feature at this school is the double-observer system, which enables triangulating findings with a view to reaching objective evaluations.

The existing empirical evidence alludes to the distinctions between formal and informal observations, and tends to accord the latter type more significance. For example, delineating the 'supervising and evaluating instruction' aspect of their PIMRS, Hallinger & Murphy (1985:222) refer to the value of 'providing instructional support to teachers, and monitoring classroom instruction through numerous *informal* classroom visits' (emphasis added). Speaking in the context of principals' instructional support, both Southworth (2002), and Blasé & Blasé (2002), highlight the benefits of informal interactions in improving the quality of teaching, and all these authors are silent on the issue of 'formal' observations. Despite this, Glover et al (1998) are sceptical about the effectiveness of informal monitoring, and Wise (2001) suggests a combination of both formal and informal observation methods.

#### *Lesson observations: feedback*

One method of fulfilling Blasé & Blasé's (2002), and Southworth's (2002) notion of informal interactions is through feedback. The message that can be deduced from the literature is twofold; first, feedback is not a one-off event. Second, it is informal, as noted above. For example, Southworth (2002) speaks of the heads' follow-up meetings with teachers after their initial classroom visits. Blasé & Blasé (2002) describe successful instructional leaders as those who provide informal feedback linked to observed lessons through enquiry-based strategies in a safe and trusting environment. This approach, identified by Harris et al (1995) as a feature of effective departments, was evident in schools A and D only, due to their 'drop-in' monitoring mechanisms. However, the parallel appraisal structure at these schools and, by extension, at

schools B and C, tends to undermine the value of such efforts, leading to a lack of trust.

*Lesson observations: alternative methods*

In addition to this formal/informal dichotomy, there is evidence that all the four schools employ alternative and additional ways of quality control. These include a raft of methods ranging from considering students and parents' feedback to checking lesson plans, students' work, assessments, exercise books, and classrooms. This finding agrees with the conclusions of Bennett (1995), and Javadi's (2014) findings in Malaysia, but contrasts with Wise's (2001) suggestion of a link between the HoDs' implicit awareness of the need for monitoring and their perceived disinterest or inability to do so. Despite Glover et al's (1998) doubts about the benefit of these methods, these approaches, though at varying degrees, tend to be systemically embedded in the schools' staff handbooks rather than left to personal choice or preference.

*Lesson observations: time constraint*

Time constraint has been a common barrier to the monitoring role of middle leaders (e.g. Adey & Jones, 1997; Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Glover et al, 1998; Wise & Bush, 1999; Wise & Bennett, 2003; Busher, 2005; Mercer & Ri, 2006; Javadi, 2014). The findings from the schools suggest that middle leaders' teaching role continues to dominate their job scope, albeit at varying degrees. This is consistent with Wise & Bush's (1999) remark of very limited leadership time allocations for the HoDs, suggesting that Earley & Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) recommendation for more time availability in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has not been taken

seriously at the dawn of the third millennium. The most affected school is D with HoDs who have trouble finding a balance between their heavy teaching load and their dual monitoring responsibilities, i.e. formal and informal. The most typical school is A which connects well with Bolam & Turner's (2003:135) description of HoDs who have 'a small, extra amount of teaching load'; similar to school D, HoDs at this school practise parallel observation programmes, i.e. formal and informal. The data indicate that impediments to quality control are not necessarily limited to school-based factors. School C is a good example of the impact that an external intervention, the accreditation project, can have on the internal functions of the HoDs. HoDs at school B have the lowest teaching hours of all the schools, with responsibility for formal observation only. While this arrangement may seem ideal for monitoring instructional quality, the data point to other parameters which emerged to undermine the value of this opportunity. These are discussed below.

#### Principal leadership and staff absenteeism: a relationship

All the case-study schools have experienced teacher absenteeism, but this is more evident and more frequent at school B. Three clauses in the school document are allocated to this matter, with two delineating the consequences if such a practice persists. Contrary to this, the principal at this school was observed asking teachers to request their leave three days in advance with worksheets prepared. Such absences can have a serious impact on the quality of instruction at this school. According to the observational and documentary data, instruction is taken seriously in all the schools, however, it was observed to be least discussed at school B. Meeting agendas were dominated by matters that had

little relevance to instructional quality. The principal of school B was observed to be a dominant figure – a ‘mecca’, leading to questions about her role as an instructional leader. The findings suggest that leaders’ instructional requirements, such as ‘high levels of knowledge and understanding of curricula, pedagogy, student and adult learning’ (Southworth, 2002:87), are limited in the case of the school B principal. This connects to doubts about the extent of heads’ instructional engagement in the literature (e.g. Cuban, 1988; Hallinger & Lee, 2014) and understanding (e.g. Hill, 2001; Elmore, 2003; Bush & Heystek, 2006; Grant, 2006; Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013; Kaparou & Bush, 2015). This perceived weakness, and the high staff absenteeism at school B, provide powerful support for the connection Blasé & Blasé (2002:261) suggest between the benefits of the principal’s instructional engagement and ‘increased teacher ... instructional focus, and ... motivation’.

The situation at the remaining three schools is different. While school C’s accreditation intervention had overshadowed the normal functions of its principal, schools A and D provide useful lessons. The English HoD’s account of school D’s head of secondary’s agreement to cover a lesson for her to visit two lessons could be taken as the head’s recognition of the HoDs’ monitoring role at his school, and is consistent with Earley & Fletcher-Campbell’s (1989) suggestion. The greatest limitation of this ‘sacrifice’ though is that it is unsustainable. In contrast to schools B and D, the head of school A’s engagement with instructional matters was seen to be mediated through the HoDs whom, in their own right, stated that they were operating along the lines stipulated in the school documents.



### Documentation

The use of 'documents' and 'documentation' has some empirical basis in the literature. For example, in her UK-based study of department heads, Wise (2001:338) mentions 'staff handbooks' and 'generic job descriptions', which include descriptions of the monitoring role of the HoDs in a similar manner to that reported in this thesis's schools. Brown & Rutherford (1998; also see Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989) also discuss the significance of departmental documentation in their UK-based study.

During the field work, the value of school and/or departmental documentation came to the fore after it became evident that those schools with a higher degree of discrepancies in their understanding of the monitoring procedures had their documents either loosely compiled or not easily accessible when requested to be seen, a feature of ineffective departments identified by Harris (1998; see also Weller, 2001). The only school which was able to provide a relatively well-developed staff handbook was school A, as also seen in Harris et al's (1995) effective departments. In this school, the participants spoke confidently and coherently about the observation types and procedures. This measure of clarity and coherence was not equally matched by the other three schools.

### Induction

A starting point to provide a coherent and consistent understanding of the HoDs' monitoring roles is the induction programmes schools can organise for their existing and new staff. Unlike Ofsted's (1996:44) remark about induction programmes in 'most secondary schools' in England, in Malaysia, the only school in which this matter was discussed is school D, perhaps because

it is newly established. However, the organisation of this one-month opportunity has some inconsistencies. While the local staff managed to attend this event in the period of time allocated, the expatriate English and science HoDs were not able to do so due to entry requirements to Malaysia. This may serve to explain why, despite such a lengthy preparation programme and the availability of a staff handbook, perceptions about lesson observations do not fully cohere. Serious attention to effective induction, as demanded by the interviewees in Thorpe & Bennett-Powell (2014) for the HoDs, can produce similar results to those described by Southworth (2002:84), as in all his case-study schools, there were instructional policies that were 'common' and 'actively used' by staff.

#### Peer observation

Another method of ensuring quality instruction, as displayed in table 8.1, is peer observation, and by extension, modelling (see Heng & Marsh, 2009 in Singapore). The use of the term 'peer' is somewhat ambiguous, and open to interpretation, as to whether or not it extends to formal leaders, e.g. principals and HoDs, or includes teachers only, or a combination of both. The evidence from the literature inclines towards the combined approach. Both Southworth (2002), and Blasé & Blasé (2002), stress the role of principals as instructional role models who 'use their teaching as an example of what and how to do things' (Southworth, 2002:84), 'in classrooms and during conferences' (Blasé & Blasé, 2002:258). As this researcher's observations suggest, school leaders who are found to fit this description, in descending order of direct engagement, are those in schools D, C, and A. In one secondary staff meeting, which also served the purpose of CPD, school D's

head of secondary was observed to engage staff in discussions pertinent to teaching and learning. The remarkable features of this training opportunity included collaboration, reflection and inter-departmental mingling. A similar meeting was reported to have been organised by the principal of school C. In school A, with guidance from the HoS, this function was observed to be carried out by the HoDs in their departmental meetings, similar to the HoDs in Lebanon (Ghamrawi, 2010).

The second component of peer observation pertains to teachers, and it pursues the goal of encouraging this cohort to become 'peer coaches and models for each other' (Blasé & Blasé, 2002:260; also see Wise, 2001). Except for the systematic approach adopted by the science department in school D, the overall experience of this type of observation is not very successful for two main reasons; organisational and personal. Organisational barriers include understaffed departments, lack of explicit instructions, time constraints, clashing time slots and heavy teaching loads. Personal issues are linked to feelings of unease, resistance and unwillingness (e.g. Harris, 1998; Ghamrawi, 2010; Kaparou & Bush, 2015). The scope of these issues is understood to be greater at schools A and B, compared to school C, overshadowed by its accreditation intervention, and school D, perhaps because it is a new school. The recurring complaint across the four schools concerns the shortage of time.

The interview data also cast doubt on the Blasés' (2002) optimistic conception of peer observation. For example, two practitioners in schools B and C had devised their own criteria for classroom visits. While the former based his judgement for selecting a colleague on

feedback from the students, the latter preferred to visit lessons or invite colleagues with whom he had a good relationship. This arbitrary method contrasts with the systematic approach adopted by school D's science department, as noted above. School D was also the only school that enabled peer observation by permitting relief. The interview data also reveal that peer observation, in its combined fashion, may be both departmental and inter-departmental. The data show that the latter type is more encouraged, especially at schools A and D.

### Continuing professional development

Closely linked to the idea of peer observation is CPD. All four schools have been involved in training programmes, with the following categories:

- Organised internally, delivered internally
- Organised internally, delivered externally
- Organised externally, delivered internally
- Organised externally, delivered externally

The first, and the most common, category happens when the staff are trained by another member of staff, for example in schools C and D, where the principals used staff meetings to provide instructional training for their own staff. This description encompasses two components; the staff meetings and the principals. The use of meetings as a medium for developing 'professional dialogue' with the staff is closely linked to Southworth's (2002:84) idea. Principals' engagement with teachers, unlike the difficulties in Turkey (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013), resonates with Hallinger & Murphy's (1985:223) 'promoting professional development', by which they can 'lead in-

service training activities'. This category, however, has been criticised by Glover et al (1998) for its limitations.

The second category applies to a scenario where an external trainer is invited to deliver training, for example in school A, where a CIE trainer was invited to lead the training session. The third category pertains to a situation where (a group of) staff travel to another school to be trained by an on-site trainer; no example of this was reported. The final category applies when (a group of) staff travel to another school to be trained by an external trainer. The prime example of this scenario is the maths teacher at school B who, upon his request for upskilling, was sent to another school to be trained by a CIE trainer. Despite concerns expressed over external training (e.g. Harris et al, 2000; Kaparou & Bush, 2015), in most of the 'organised externally' cases, the staff said they received sponsorship from their schools, except for the maths teacher at school B who was asked to sign a two-year pledge of service. This latter example entails an important implication. In delineating the 'professional development' dimension of their PIMRS, Hallinger & Murphy (1985:223) speak about the role of principals in 'informing teachers of opportunities for staff development' (see also Lai & Cheung, 2013; Malakolunthu et al, 2014). However, the example of the maths teacher at school B points to the contrary as this was a teacher-led initiative, given the principal's lack of instructional understanding. These data provide strong support for Blasé and Blasé's (2002:259) emphasis on 'providing staff development opportunities'. The 'internal/external' classification above serves to reassert their notion of 'collaborative networks', which can be enabled through contacts with practitioners at other schools.

### Instructional leadership in Malaysia

In his unpublished study in Malaysia, Javadi (2014) identified three main barriers; shortage of time, lack of training and disinterest in leadership. Two years on, the current findings show that time constraints continue to hamper HoDs. The promotion of school D's maths teacher to HoD through an internal appointment process, within a relatively short period of time indicates that preparation for leadership continues to be ignored.

In Ghavifekr et al's (2014) study, remarks about holding conference with teachers, observation and peer observation are consistent with the evidence from this thesis that the schools attach great importance to instruction. The case studies also provide powerful indications of shifts in attitudes towards leadership in the form of monitoring. This turning point can be understood through the manner in which the monitoring role has become part of a systemic mechanism articulated, though at varying degrees of clarity and consistency, in staff handbooks and job descriptions. Broadly speaking, the data bear testimony to this understanding that those schools with more effectively mapped out instructional dimensions, schools A and D, are in a better position to provide quality education compared to those with developing and less well developed documentation, notably schools C and B.

### **Distributed leadership**

Much of this thesis is devoted to the examination of DL, and by extension, TL. In a joint study of TL, Muijs & Harris (2007) ask two questions:

- Who is involved in decision-making in the school?
- Do teachers ever initiate decisions in this school?

The authors' focus on 'decisions' and 'decision-making' highlights the importance of this matter. However, decision-making, and the mechanisms involved in this, are linked to a wider conceptual framework, that of autonomy. Thus, it is useful to use autonomy to discuss leadership practice at the four schools.

#### Distributed leadership: middle leaders and autonomy

In its generic sense, autonomy can be defined as freedom of action. In DL-specific conception, it entails two important dimensions; the power to make decisions and the authority to implement those decisions. In this regard, Bush & Middlewood (2013:73) express an opinion about teachers' involvement in decision-making, which can suitably extend to middle leaders; 'All teachers should be involved in decision-making and "own" the outcomes of discussions'. Through this lens, the picture that emerges from these four schools points to limited opportunities for the HoDs to exercise leadership in the manner that characterises DL in its most collegiate understanding. The more in-depth picture, however, contains subtleties, which are discussed below.

#### *Serious vs. less serious dichotomy*

During the field work in all the four schools, it progressively became clearer that HoDs' autonomy may be applied differentially for 'serious' and 'less serious' categories. In broad terms, 'less serious' matters are linked to teaching and learning, and confined to the classroom domain. On the other hand, 'serious' issues

pertain to policies, and operate beyond the boundary of the classroom or the department. For the former category, the HoDs claimed, and were reported to have, a greater measure of autonomy, compared to the latter category for which opportunities were said to be limited.

Of all the four schools, the HoDs who are perceived to be more engaged with the practice of leadership are at schools A and D, and to a lesser extent, at school C. In these schools, the HoDs were observed leading their staff by holding meetings which, in the case of school A, was the most routine and organised. Despite this, the manner in which they find themselves engaged in leadership follows the serious/less serious dichotomy. For example, the HoDs in these schools have great autonomy in matters related to students, syllabi, curriculum overviews or relief timetabling. The area in which they have little say is generally linked to school policies which, according to the interview data, include matters such as budgeting, drastic changes, academic timetabling, placement of students, or moving dates in the calendar. This notion of limited autonomy is consistent with the findings of Adey (2000) in England and Javadi (2014) in Malaysia. The interview data in this thesis point to two reasons for this perceived limited autonomy; whole-school matters and parents. As for the former, ST3 at school C, for example, remarked that her science HoD had sufficient freedom to decide on the arrangement of the stools and tables at the lab, but needed to seek permission if his decision involved reconfiguring the lab. Also, the HoDs are given little leeway in situations where decisions would involve parents. It is common practice for international schools to spell out their policies via handbooks. Some of these



policies, as reported at schools A and D, pertain to the placement of students in classes or the school events' calendar. Any modification to these may cause confusion and discontent among parents as fee-paying customers.

There are two empirical sources which provide useful insights into the matters discussed above; Lambert (1975) and Wise & Bush (1999). Less than half a century ago, Lambert (1975) produced a comprehensive outline of 58 'role-functions' of middle leaders under four categories. The majority of these are linked to instruction, which tend to agree with the findings of this thesis in the new century. However, Lambert's findings about the four functions, linked to policies, need to be examined with caution (see Table 8.3).

	<b>Role-functions</b>	<b>HoDs</b>	<b>Heads</b>
<b>1</b>	Play a part in the development of school policy	0.88	1.0
<b>2</b>	Developing a departmental policy	0.94	0.83
<b>3</b>	Setting definite aims and objectives for the department	0.89	0.83
<b>4</b>	Develop departmental policy by discussion with departmental staff	0.94	0.83
<b>Overall index</b>		<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.49</b>

*Table 8.3: The index of agreement between HoDs & heads*

The figures in the table depict the index of agreement between the HoDs and the heads. Interestingly, though not significantly, as far as departmental decision-making is concerned, the averaged overall index of items 2, 3 & 4 is in favour of the HoDs' autonomy (0.92), compared to the heads (0.83). In other words, there is a greater expectation that the HoDs should undertake these responsibilities within their departments. In regards to school policy (item 1), however, the reverse is the case, indicating

that school-level policy setting should be within the remit of the heads (1.0), rather than the HoDs (0.88).

At first glance, it may appear that the HoDs in Lambert's study enjoy more autonomy than the ones reported in this thesis. On the contrary, the overall findings of both studies tend to agree, albeit four decades apart. The majority of the role-functions mentioned by Lambert are linked to instruction and, thus, follow the dichotomy discussed above, i.e. 'less serious'. It is for this category that the HoDs in the table above have greater autonomy, which tends to be consistent with the findings in this thesis. In contrast, the HoDs' extent of autonomy in Lambert's study tends to diminish for school policy, identified as a 'serious' matter in this thesis, and recognised in the literature (e.g. Buckby, 1997; Glover et al, 1998; Adey, 2000; Mercer & Ri, 2006; Tam, 2010; Javadi, 2014).

Wise & Bush (1999) employed a similar methodology to Lambert's. A partial section in this study involves a discussion of eight factors, or 'role set', which can influence middle leaders' decision-making. One of these role sets is 'parents and guardians' (p.187). Contrary to the primacy given to 'parents' in this thesis, they are accorded the very insignificant overall figure of 0.6%, ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, with the departmental staff (58.8%) and head & senior management (21.7%) occupying the top positions. This finding contrasts with this thesis, perhaps because private schools tend to rely on funding from parents to cover their costs. Although the passage of time has reversed the role significance of 'parents' in public and 'fee-paying parents' in private schools, factors influencing the HoDs do not seem to have changed much either way.

### *Consultation, decision-making and implementation*

An essential prerequisite to involving staff in decision-making is consultation, as acknowledged by the principals in Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett's (2005:63) UK study where they 'highlighted the importance of being consultative leaders ... encouraging the involvement of staff in decision-making and developing policy'. However, in schools A and D, where leadership opportunities are more visible, 'consultation' entails complexities. For example, in both these schools the heads of secondary were observed to have a tendency to consult a particular HoD more frequently than others – the English HoD in school A, and the science HoD in school D. Significantly, the heads of secondary tended to admire these HoDs for their leadership and knowledge. The extent of the influence of these HoDs on their school leaders is unclear. However, what is certain is that this practice contrasts with Bush's (1997) views about collegiality and DL.

Conversely, the HoDs preferred to consult their superiors, not because they lacked autonomy or believed in the value of consultation, but because of other reservations at play. One reason given is accountability; to anticipate problematic situations and logistical challenges, as mentioned by the English HoD at school A. Another reason implies a 'face-saving' attempt to avoid embarrassing situations. Both English HoDs at schools A and D said that they chose to seek their superiors' views in order not to find out later that they were not allowed to proceed with what they had finalised with their teachers. The final reason contains cultural overtones. For the maths HoD at school A, it would be disrespectful if he tried to bypass the assistant head of secondary

to reach the HoS. These findings do not portray a genuine picture of DL in schools A and D, and even much less at school C. In this respect, the data from school B raises some questions, which are discussed below.

*Collegiality: genuine or modified?*

Unlike other case studies, leadership activity at school B was observed to be heavily hinged upon the person of the principal. On several occasions in this thesis, this principal has metaphorically been described as the 'mecca', to whom all roads lead. Given this distinctive feature, the expectation is that the data from this site should differ from what is understood and reported in the other case-study schools. Surprisingly, however, the findings from school B resonate greatly with the happenings at schools A, D and C. For example, the principal at school B tends to limit consultation to specific HoDs; maths and science. The HoD, English, is excluded from senior meetings and decision-making mainly due to differences in opinion. Furthermore, similar to the distinctions made in the other three case studies, the serious/less serious phenomenon continues to determine the nature of tasks for which an HoD could have a say at school B. This discussion, combined with the earlier observations, raises an important question, which is discussed below.

According to the interview and observation data, there is little doubt that the leadership style at school B contrasts considerably with that of schools A, D and C. The question that arises is whether or not this difference should generate different perceptions. While the answer to this question is normatively expected to be in the affirmative, the evidence points to the contrary. The interview

data at schools A and D provide vital clues to this question. The HoS at school A, for example, justifies the rationale for broadening the leadership perimeter as a vehicle for promoting leadership at his school. Speaking about the positions and responsibilities offered to staff, he adds this; 'If we didn't fill them [the positions] with someone else, they [the responsibilities] would lay on our shoulders to cover those'. This remark casts doubt on the real motive behind the perceived involvement of the HoDs in decision-making in this school, and serves to strengthen the position of DL's critics such as Hatcher (2005), Fitzgerald & Gunter (2008), and Hargreaves & Fink (2009) who view the popularity of DL as 'pragmatic: to ease the burden of over-worked headteachers' (Hartley, 2010:271). In another example, the heads of secondary at schools C and D tend to recognise the importance of line management, which evokes positional authority – DL's controversial dimension. In their commissioned study, Muijs & Harris (2007) examined TL at three illustrative schools. In school A, a primary school, where TL is claimed to be present, they report the benefits of line management structures, with clear 'reporting lines' and 'a strong sense among teachers' of leadership involvement (p.119).

While this may suggest congruence between Muijs & Harris's findings and the ones reported in this thesis, great caution needs to be exercised. The authors report 'a strong sense among teachers', and by extension, HoDs, of involvement in leadership. In this thesis's case studies C and D, two secondary schools, however, such a sense is not discerned or reported. In the same study, Muijs & Harris sought to find out who was involved in decision-making in their case-study schools. Their findings

suggest that, while at primary school A, 86% of the senior leaders, middle leaders *and* teachers are involved in decision-making, in the secondary school B this figure is only 12%, with the majority of the decisions (77%) taken by the senior and middle leaders, excluding teachers. This latter finding resonates with the data in the present author's secondary schools; they also suggest differential approach towards decision-making between primary and secondary schools, as highlighted by Xie & Shen (2013) in the United States. In the late 1990s, Bush (1997) writes about the possibility of having collegiality in its 'modified version'. Two decades on, this can be extended to the leadership practices discussed in this thesis.

*International schools: principals vs. owners*

Bush (1997:73) discusses the notion of 'modified collegiality' in the context of external accountability. To the principals, middle leaders and teachers of these four schools, the notion of external accountability differs from public schools. They are the founders, owners or directors of private international schools. There is growing evidence of tension between the principals and the owners of these schools (e.g. Hawley, 1994; Littleford, 1999; Bunnell, 2006; Lee et al, 2012; Javadi, 2014). In one or two interviews in each school, an allusion was made to this cohort implying a more sophisticated hierarchical structure that one would normally encounter in non-private schools. In one example, a teacher at school C claimed that the HoDs received their orders from the owners rather than the HoS, which is indicative of a 'backchannel' mechanism. These circumstances may force these principals to tread cautiously as they also feel the pressure to

report the outcomes of their decisions and actions to a higher authority.

#### Types of middle leadership appointment and models of leadership distribution

According to the interview data, there are two mechanisms for the appointment of HoDs at the schools; external recruitment and internal promotion. The external appointees include the English and maths HoDs at school A, and the English and science HoDs at school D. These are four out of the 12 HoDs who were interviewed, suggesting a high proportion of internal appointments. Within the internal category, as school C reveals, there is the possibility of rotation whereby a middle leader assumes the position of HoD for the length of an academic year, with the possibility of renewal.

In none of the case-studies was there an explicit reference to leadership training for the HoDs. At school C, which operates the rotating system, one criterion for the installation of a new HoD was claimed to be tenure-based. Another criterion, as further evidence from this school and others suggests, is volunteering, as in the case of HoDs at school C, or the maths candidates at school D. These circumstances echo Turner's (2000:301) remark of the important role of 'classroom competence and ... sufficient experience of teaching' for appointing HoDs.

#### *Models of leadership distribution*

Table 2.8 serves to display 13 possibilities of leadership distribution. Of these, models proposed by Hay Group Education (2004), MacBeath (2005), Hargreaves & Fink (2006), Ritchie & Woods (2007) and Muijs & Harris (2007) were discussed in detail throughout the literature review section.

Plotting leadership distribution models on a continuum from left (less consultative) to right (more consultative), the grand picture that emerges from the case-study data suggests a strong tendency towards the 'less consultative' end of the scale. This description is equivalent to the Hay Group's (2004) 'instruct, consult and delegate' models, which equate to Hargreaves & Fink's (2006) 'autocracy, traditional and progressive delegation' categories. In terms of the models on the right-hand side of the table, all the case-study schools, albeit being at varying stage and pace, fall within the 'emerging' category as they are all 'nearer the beginning of the journey towards DL' (Ritchie & Woods, 2007:376), which is equivalent to Muijs & Harris's (2007) 'restricted'. As for the patterns introduced by MacBeath (2005), the data point to four models; formal, pragmatic, incremental and opportunistic. Middle leadership, in the form of academic HoDs, is a manifestation of formal leadership, and hence 'formal' distribution, the central tenets of which are hierarchy and positional authority. 'Pragmatic' distribution is to deal with unexpected demands, and is hinged upon capability, expertise and reliability. The closest example to this category are school A and B's English HoDs where one is in charge of learning & assessment, among others, and the other provides counsel and references to senior students, for example. An HoD to reconcile with MacBeath's 'incremental' distribution is school D's maths leader. Her appointment to this position could be taken as 'sponsored growth' with a view to 'professional development' in that she may be 'given more' as she 'proves [her] ability to exercise leadership' (p.360). The final category is 'opportunistic' distribution, which essentially functions in schools with internal appointments. This is



evident in the rotation system implemented at school C, via volunteering, and in the case of school D's installation of a maths HoD whereby two contending internal candidates volunteered for the vacancy.

Ritchie & Woods' (2007) attempt to describe schools with 'emerging' leadership distribution as those who are 'nearer the beginning of the journey towards DL' sits comfortably with schools A, D and C, but less so with B.

#### Distributed leadership: barriers

As noted earlier, middle leadership is a manifestation of DL, and thus, discussing barriers to this may seem to be inappropriate. A more logical argument, however, would involve a discussion of the balance of power between the principals/heads and the middle leaders. In the words of Harris (2005a:18),

The possibility of distributed leadership in any school will depend on whether the head and the leadership team relinquish power, and the extent to which staff embrace the opportunity to lead.

In the four schools, the staff Harris speaks of are the HoDs, who, as the data suggest, are at different stages of motivation to embrace leadership opportunities. Nonetheless, the key phrase in Harris's remark above is expressed in line 2 – 'relinquish power'.

As the discussion above suggests, there is little evidence in support of the leaders' willingness to let go of their positional power. This is evident at school D, and most notably at school B with its limited distributed and consultative leadership style. Interview data from these two sites point to five primary obstacles

to widening leadership to include the middle leaders. These are as follows:

1. (Lack of) trust
2. Focus on instruction
3. Finding the right person
4. Workload, and
5. Salaries

The interview data from school D indicate the HoS's asymmetrical distribution of trust among his HoDs. While the science HoD is highly trusted, mainly due to her knowledge and experience, the English HoD is the least so, and as a result, is subject to the HoS's 'build-up' approach in that the more the bond between the two is strengthened, the more there is the possibility of broader leadership opportunities. Circumstances at school B are more complicated. There are four main barriers to DL at this school, which can be divided into two broad categories; attitude (themes 2 & 3), and realities (themes 4 & 5).

Wise & Bush (1999) found that, for their participant HoDs, teaching was the priority. Less than two decades on, this is re-echoed, though from a different perspective, by the principal of school B who believes that the main concern of middle leaders should be instruction. Complementing this opinion is her idealistic view of the 'right person' whom she can trust '100 per cent'. These views recall Harris's (2005a) remark above which links the possibility of DL to the principal's attitude.

Two other obstacles preventing school B's principal from broadening the leadership perimeter are workload and financial considerations, which were reported to be considerable. This tight

budget may have convinced this leader to adopt the 'instruction-only' stance above, but the evidence is that the HoDs at school B have the lowest teaching hours compared to their counterparts at the other case-study schools. The paradoxical combination of the HoDs' light workload, and their limited leadership opportunities, serves to highlight the significance of a leader's attitude and belief in determining the extent to which leadership can be exercised by middle leaders, and by extension, teachers.

### **Teacher Leadership**

The examination of middle leadership against the theoretical and conceptual backdrop of DL involved a discussion of autonomy, DL models and barriers, among others. The examination of TL follows a similar pattern, although on a larger scale due to the greater sample size of 36 teachers in the four schools, against 12 HoDs.

#### Teacher leadership: teachers and autonomy

The interview data with teachers confirm the 'serious vs. less serious' distinction discussed earlier. They serve to portray a picture of limited teacher autonomy, confined to the classroom and, thus, linked to instruction. This evidence is consistent with Xie & Shen's (2013) conclusion, indicating that leadership involvement in the US public schools 'is still mainly confined to the boundary of the traditional area of classroom' (p.342).

#### *Roles*

It is important to clarify the difference between 'roles' and 'tasks' as understood through the data analysis. A 'role' is an officially endorsed position linked to job descriptions. A 'task', on the other hand, has several features; it is an informal duty which could be short- or long-term, one-off or routine, or a combination of these.

A role incumbent is contractually in a more conducive position to exercise leadership, an advantage that may not be readily available to a task performer.

As the data from the four-case studies indicate, there is some evidence of roles being assumed by teachers, although their scope is outnumbered by tasks. While some roles include assistant HoD, homeroom teacher, year group leader, and examination officer, some roles require taking on responsibilities for relief and academic timetabling, pastoral duties (student affairs), as well as membership of disciplinary committees, and leading sports houses.

### *Tasks*

Almost all the tasks, as noted earlier, are linked to students and instruction. These consist of short-term and/or one-off responsibilities such as sports day duties, trips, games, competitions, debates, celebration evenings, selection of textbooks, book week, and international school fairs. Examples of long-term and/or routine duties include preparations of schemes of work, curriculum overviews, examination papers, report cards, budgets, as well as invigilation, conducting assemblies, and supervising co-curricular activities. Contrary to this extensive range of responsibilities, duties and activities, the teachers reported limited authority to formulate policies pertinent to these tasks.

### *Consultation, decision-making and implementation*

A benchmark against which professional autonomy can be judged is the extent to which staff are consulted and invited to actively participate in decision-making. As the data suggest, none of the

36 teachers in this research claim any such involvement. They are all policy followers rather than policy initiators. This situation has considerable resonance with Muijs & Harris's (2007) case-study of TL in three illustrative schools. Of these, school C, in Muijs & Harris's enquiry, is closest to the findings of this thesis. In this school, 80% of the teachers said that their opinions were sought, however, only 20% said that they had opportunities to initiate decisions. In terms of TL, as the authors claim, school C is in the weakest position compared to the other two schools, where figures are more suggestive of TL.

Muijs & Harris mention several reasons for school C's weak TL, the closest of which to this thesis's findings is staff apathy about leadership roles. However, not all the teachers in this thesis hold unfavourable views about their perceived limited autonomy, resulting in mixed reactions. While more of the teachers express discontent over their limited autonomy, there is a small number which appreciates the benefits of this limitation. For example, in school A, a teacher views the current limited participative culture in her school as a convenient way to reach agreement, not least because this can avoid lengthy negotiations. In school C, a teacher sees this culture as an opportunity for her to focus on teaching, and avoid additional responsibilities.

Many teachers revealed that, despite enjoying autonomy within the domain of their classrooms, they still preferred to consult their HoDs before taking action. This was most evident in school A, and, to a lesser degree, at school D. The rationale behind this preference can broadly be divided into two categories; technical and cultural. Technical consultation takes place with the HoDs

and/or senior teachers for their ideas, experience, and knowledge; one goal of this, in the words of a teacher at school A, is for standardisation purposes. Culturally speaking, some other teachers consider consultation with HoDs 'out of respect' (school A), and the 'the right way to do [things]' (school D). These perceptions can be compared with the remark of a teacher in Muijs & Harris's (2007) case study which serves to highlight the fine line between consultation and permission:

I go to courses or meetings with the LEA [Local Education Authority], and I just sort of take initiatives. I don't tell Sally [i.e. the principal, a pseudonym] about each and every one. I say "can we have a staff meeting about this", and she goes "fine". (p.116)

Although it is difficult to ascertain whether the purpose behind this teacher's question is consultation or permission, this thesis's findings largely suggest a cultural orientation, which privileges 'permission' over 'consultation'. This conception could potentially hamper well-intentioned efforts to broaden the leadership perimeter not least because, even if granted sufficient autonomy for decision-making and implementation, some teachers, under the influence of their culture, may still feel the need to share their plans before implementation. A comment by an SMT member in Muijs & Harris's (2007) study confirms the impact of culture on the school administrators' choices, as they use sharing to 'please' the principal (p.120).

The term 'please' carries powerful cultural overtones. These reflections recall Shaw's (2001:135) account of a principal who decided to widen the leadership boundary to include teachers, but

is 'frustrated by some staff who seem unwilling or unable to take the decisions that ... constantly referring back up to her'.

Although the cause of this principal's frustration is perceived to be staff apathy or incompetence, it could also be rooted in their culture, which tends to preclude action without prior approval. The evidence that derives from this thesis is illuminating, for example in respect of a science teacher at school C who is also in charge of pastoral care. One of her responsibilities requires that she generates a duty list. Despite her claim of full autonomy for sending out this list herself, she still chooses to do so via the HoS because, this way, it carries 'more weight', and serves to convince the teachers of its importance. This remark bears great resonance with school D's HoS's 'stamp of authority', and his emphasis that 'decision[s] ... come from a position of authority'.

#### Models of teacher leadership involvement

Evidence from the schools, most notably school A, with its comparatively inclusive culture, suggests that models of teacher engagement in leadership are diverse. However, the picture that emerges from the findings places this perceived 'engagement' on the 'less consultative' side of DL models; e.g. 'instruct, consult, delegate' (Hay Group Education, 2004), 'autocracy, traditional/progressive delegation' (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), as well as 'emerging' (Ritchie & Woods, 2007) and 'restricted' (Muijs & Harris, 2007). These models are highly indicative of the patterns in which HoDs find themselves engaged in the formal leadership roles of their schools.

The most official manner of TL is by virtue of formal offers and invitations to the staff. This is equivalent to MacBeath's (2005)

'formal' category. Another model relies on teachers' knowledge, expertise or experience, which is equivalent to MacBeath's 'pragmatic' suggestion. 'Experience' in this category could refer to career experience having been gained in a person's lifetime or to job experience acquired in one school only. The latter applies to the teacher participants in this thesis, where a greater involvement in leadership may arise from a long stay at one particular school. Another of MacBeath's models is 'opportunistic', which is described as one that is 'taken' and 'assumed ... rather than planned' (p.361). This model manifests itself in the form of personal initiatives or expressions of interest by the teachers. There is also a final model which MacBeath refers to as 'cultural', about which I have reservations. If we accept the connection between leadership and culture, then introducing 'culture' as a discrete model is questionable not least because other models are as much influenced by cultural beliefs as the 'cultural' category.

Through the lens of this model, there are indications of connections and friendship. As the data from school A suggest, some offers are made on the basis of the relationship that the senior practitioners have with particular teachers. One such example can be found in the statement of a maths teacher, at school A, who links her appointment to the timetabling team on the basis of 'getting along', because these two practitioners have a record of mutual cooperation. Another example is given by a science teacher in the same school, which serves to provide a fresh insight in that not all friendship-based offers may be linked to creating a leadership opportunity to a colleague. On the contrary, as this finding suggests, it could be an attempt by a senior colleague, the HoD in this case, to use his friendship to



avoid controversy, and bypass this colleague on important decisions. Had this position been filled by a less friendly practitioner, decisions may have taken longer to reach due to possible differences in opinion. Hence, this model of MacBeath's tends to have stronger links to micropolitics, and as such, it would be more apt to be renamed as 'micropolitical'.

The TL models discussed here are largely congruent with the manner in which leadership is distributed among the middle leaders. This may suggest a uniform fashion of distribution from senior leaders to middle leaders, and from this cohort, to the teachers.

#### Teacher leadership: barriers

There are various barriers to TL, with some overlaps with those for the middle leaders, as shown below:

- Focus on instruction
- Salaries
- Time constraint & workload
- Leadership history
- Attitude, and
- Apathy

The first three themes are similar to those of the HoDs. In schools A, B and C there are expressions of a priority for teaching, which includes dealing with students, or 'children', as said by a teacher. This attitude tends to limit leadership or management to the domain of the classroom, and largely resonates with Liljenberg's (2015) presentation of the three schools in Sweden. In school B, most notably, there is an explicit expectation of 'a decent allowance' in return for assuming leadership responsibilities; it is in the same school that a teacher indicates a connection between

the amount of remuneration and the degree of leadership output. This financial expectation is consistent with Muijs & Harris's (2007) report of school A in which the principal remarked thus; 'One of my staff ... gets all the leadership opportunities, but doesn't want to engage unless there is some additional salary point attached' (p.120). A familiar complaint concerns shortage of time. This is most evident in school D with its packed timetable, which, according to the English HoD, barely leaves any thinking space for leadership.

Leadership history is found out to be a contributory factor to limited TL, as expressed by the HoS at school C, which is claimed to have a record of autocratic leadership. By far the greatest obstacle to TL is said to pertain to attitude, especially of those in senior positions. In school A, for example, the HoDs are not regarded as good listeners or willing to embrace new ideas. In school C, a teacher views collaborative culture as 'dangerous' because working alongside others leads to decisions which may eventually involve parents, which entails risks. This attitude in school B takes on a new character as it involves the principal who believes teaching to be the main focus for staff. Conceived in this vein, the leadership style of this principal resonates considerably with two other principals whose inaction caused DL and TL efforts to fail. The first one is reported by Hannay (2003:105) to be 'disengaged and unsupportive of staff members' in their 'early years of restructuring process'. The second one, a primary principal, is reported by Harris (2005a:15) to have 'employed a more traditional, top-down management style [who] takes decisions without much consultation with staff'. Both these cases, along with those described by Muijs & Harris (2007), introduce

traits that can, in one way or another, be found in the leadership of school B.

These themes, individually or combined, tend to play a role in contributing to apathy towards leadership among the teaching staff. In this sense, 'apathy' is perceived to be a neutral concept. What builds its identity are the other themes discussed beforehand. Thus, 'apathy' is not the cause itself, but the effect of other causes. To all these, two other factors can be added; matters external to the school setting, e.g. family, as said by a teacher in school A, and a prior unpleasant leadership experience, which may discourage new or further contributions, as reported by a teacher in school B. In addition, Harris (2008) mentions distance, culture and structure to be the key barriers to DL and TL. Of these three, the findings of this thesis highlight the impact of culture as the dominant obstacle.

#### Distributed leadership and autonomy: a case for emotions

In this thesis, a key component of DL is held to be autonomy – the space created for staff to practise leadership. Three questions were asked of case study participants; feelings about school leadership, department leadership, and the degree of satisfaction with autonomy. The findings point to two main factors.

First, there is more satisfaction with school leadership than with departmental leadership. Discontent with the latter appears to emanate from the frequent adult interactions at this level, which may not always end happily. The second factor relates to an inverse relationship between the degree of autonomy and the amount of satisfaction contingent upon the parameter of location. For example, within the domain of the classroom, where

autonomy is high, all the teachers feel pleased and effective. The more they move away from the classroom, the more the expressions of discontent and frustration increase. This perceived dissatisfaction, however, is not necessarily linked to leadership roles. It could emanate from personal perceptions such as the HoS's focus on expatriate teachers and parents at school A, or originate in complaints about competencies being ignored at school B, or from unhappy voices about heavy workloads at school D. In other words, the expressions of discontent tend to be high in cases where there is a perceived lack of power, authority and influence.

Interview data about leadership satisfaction provide two additional perspectives. The first indicates a journey from 'effectiveness' to 'frustration'. This is evident in a teacher's remark at school C where his tenure began with high hopes and ended in frustration. This is largely due to diminishing leadership opportunities. Another finding contrasts with the observations discussed above. Given the limited opportunities for leadership participation at the four schools, there are still positive voices who express content with the status quo. These voices come from those who tend to *compare* their current school with the ones they have worked in before, re-echoing the remarks by a teacher in school B in Muijs & Harris's (2007) study.

As for the HoDs, however, the case is slightly different as their workplace is situated at a point between the senior management office and the classroom. The cause of dissatisfaction for this cohort is no longer the location, but the extent to which they can influence the decision-making processes in their departments and

schools. One example is school B's maths HoD who bemoans the fact that she lacks autonomy, and demands 'a little space' to enable her to 'take a decision now', that is, when the need arises. This expectation corresponds to that expressed by the HoDs in Buckby's (1997) study who, on a scale between 0 and 5, chose to grade their leadership involvement as low as 1 and 2 (10 out of 13), in contrast to a normative view which demanded that this be increased to grades 3 and 4 (9 out of 13) (also see Mercer & Ri, 2006 in China). The time span of two decades between Buckby's (1997) findings and those reported in this thesis is reminiscent of Ribbins' (2007) warning that 'we should not assume that just because time has passed things are necessarily significantly different' (p.27).

#### Distributed leadership and teacher leadership in Malaysia

In Malaysia, a section that can usefully be used in Ghavifekr et al's (2014) study validates claims about heavy workload for both teachers and middle leaders; 'The paperwork ... has burdened the teachers' (p.127), or 'The workload of a head of department is very heavy' (p.130). These remarks are consistent with those identified as barriers to DL and TL above, and also with a teacher's comment in school C, reported by Muijs & Harris (2007), on time lost as a result of dealing with 'difficult children' (p.124).

Similarly, in Javadi's (2014) unpublished study in a Malaysian international school, the HoDs, introduced as 'subject coordinators', complain about heavy workload (e.g. subject coordinator 4). They also deny any leadership training (e.g. subject coordinator 2), or interest in leadership responsibilities (e.g. subject coordinator 1). Similar to the findings of this thesis,

there are expressions of discontent with the amount of autonomy (e.g. subject coordinators 1 & 5). In one example, it is possible to learn about the leadership style at this international school; 'It is always instruction because it is a little bit too commercialised' (subject coordinator 1, p.42). This remark serves to suggest similarities between this finding and the ones reported in this thesis.

### **Roles, Responsibilities and Role Relationships**

Middle leadership is a concept of immense diversity. It comprises practitioners who are teachers *and* leaders. The former role necessitates engagement with instruction, hence instructional leadership. The latter role requires leadership involvement, hence distributed leadership and teacher leadership. From a theoretical perspective, all these dimensions are neutral concepts, the examination of which requires engagement with the notions which help to define them; roles and responsibilities. Although this chapter has explored middle leadership themes in segments, the importance of their inter-dependency cannot be overstated.

The examination of roles in the four schools involved documentary analysis and interviews. What the former served to provide was a standard understanding of middle leadership roles, as stipulated in staff handbooks and job descriptions. The goal of the latter method, however, was twofold; to elicit role conceptions as comprehended and interpreted by individuals, and to compare these with the standard definitions in the documents. The grand picture from the cross-case data analyses is that, while middle leadership is perceived to be well-established at schools A, D, and C, albeit at varying stages of development, it is loosely defined

and poorly understood at school B. The differences of understanding are not limited to school level; they also extend to department and individual levels. Role conceptions are selective and fragmentary; they are arbitrarily defined and subjectively interpreted, leading to uncertainty, as reported in the literature (e.g. Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Jarvis, 2008; Rosenfeld et al, 2009; Tam, 2010). In such circumstances, personal judgements abound, which generate a wealth of descriptors. Scrutinising these terms and phrases, i.e. content analysis, serves to provide useful insights into middle leadership role conceptions.

### Content analysis

As noted earlier, in contrast to schools C and B, leadership involvement is more visible in schools A and D. This perception has an impact on the manner in which participants choose to interpret the role of the middle leaders. Broadly speaking, the descriptors about the middle leaders can be divided into four categories:

- Expectations
- Organisational position
- Responsibilities and
- Characteristics

### Middle leadership: expectations

The documents in the four schools articulate the formal organisational expectations of the HoDs. They require that the HoDs be excellent teachers (school A) with relevant expertise (school B) and full weekly teaching load (school C) who take responsibility for teaching and learning in their schools (school D), perceptions which agree with the international role conceptions (e.g. Ofsted, 1996; Busher & Harris, 1999; Harris et al, 2001;

Wise, 2001; Tam, 2010; Wong et al, 2010; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012). These phrases serve to highlight the importance these schools attach to teaching and learning. When uttered by the participants, expectations from the HoDs tend to diverge from the articulations of the formal job descriptions, notably in schools A and D, echoing the discrepancies that Weller (2001) found in the United States. From a managerial stance, at school A for example, there are respondents who regard their HoDs as practitioners who provide instructions, rules and regulations, as well as information about the syllabus. Complementing this view are voices which expect the HoDs to provide direction, set expectations and targets, as well as discuss and exchange opinions. The implicit tone in the latter phrases is indicative of growing awareness about the need for leadership. A similar inclination towards leadership can be discerned in the statements of the participants at school D, although its scale remains limited compared to the volume of managerial expectations. This perceived tendency for leadership is less evident at school C and, the least at school B, as almost all the aspects of these schools are limited to the execution of managerial tasks and responsibilities, as also reported elsewhere, e.g. Jarvis (2008) in England and Mercer & Ri (2006) in China.

Under four categories of academic, administrative, managerial, and educational, Wise & Bush (1999) introduce 16 tasks commonly undertaken by middle leaders. Their goal is to map out the perceptions of the heads and the HoDs with regard to the expectations they have of one another for the undertaking of these tasks. Of the 16 tasks, only two, theme 2 under 'academic tasks', and theme 2 under 'administrative tasks', can be linked to leadership:



- Formulating curriculum aims, objectives and content
- Making decisions about what resources to buy

Although the percentile difference between the heads and the HoDs for the tasks above is small, 3.9 and 6.0, indicating considerable agreement, the extent of leadership practice that these tasks may permit is limited to the departmental level, and continue to have managerial overtones, which is consistent with the discussion above, suggesting that 'middle management' continues to define the role of the participating HoDs in an era of calls for 'middle leadership' (e.g. Bush, 2003a; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007).

In Malaysia, Javadi (2014:36) presents a document about the responsibilities of the subject coordinators in an international school. The middle leaders' role understanding in this document is consistent with the conceptions introduced in this thesis as they are primarily regarded as teachers. Of the eight items Javadi introduces, none entails any dimension to suggest leadership, which is indicative of the importance this school attaches to the execution of managerial responsibilities.

#### Middle leadership: organisational position

Several sources in the literature tend to situate middle leadership at the centre of the school's organisational structure. They occupy a position which is 'not part of the senior management team' (Busher & Harris, 1999:306) such as those occupied by the 'principals or deputy headteachers' (Busher et al, 2007:405), but they have 'formal responsibilities and duties of leadership and management and sit between senior leadership and teachers' (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012:57). This is most evident in the case of

the English HoD at school A, who is also the head of learning and assessment. In her interview, she considered herself 'privy' to senior management meetings not because of her role as an HoD, but due to her additional role as the head of learning and assessment.

In England, Glover et al (1998) report the role incumbent to be perceived as a bridge between the senior leaders and teachers, for which both Jarvis (2008) and Fitzgerald (2009) use the term "conduit", a notion that has been carried forward to the 2010s. In all the schools a middle leader is described as a facilitator, messenger, spokesperson, middle person, go-between (school A), inspector (school B), intermediate, coordinator, facilitator (school C), organiser, supervisor, middle person, representative, spokesperson, and bridge (school D). As a leader in this position, one is expected to fight, take care, support, link, and pass messages between the 'top' and the 'bottom'. This understanding is congruent with Adey's (2000:429) research in which the senior managers in England tend to see the middle leaders as 'line managers' whose primary goal is to align the policies at the 'top' with the action at the 'bottom'. Emphasis on line management is evident at school C, and most noticeable at school D.

#### Middle leadership: responsibilities

HoDs' responsibilities are delineated in the school documents, albeit at varying degrees of clarity. Similar to the roles, perceptions about responsibilities are selective, fragmentary and narrow. One significant distinction relates to visibility.

*Responsibilities: visibility vs. invisibility*

During the field work, most notably at school C, a new notion of 'visibility' and 'invisibility' began to emerge. 'Visibility' refers to features of an HoD's job and services which are immediately noticeable and received by a department member. 'Invisibility' pertains to the expectations that teachers have of an HoD, but do not see in practice. This situation is regardless of the official job descriptions, and serves to lead to a 'narrow' conception of an HoD's roles and responsibilities. This scenario occurs in schools where documents are not taken seriously, e.g. in the 'ineffective' departments studied by Harris (1998). In all the schools, the participants, including the HoDs, admitted that they had read such documents as contracts, job descriptions, and staff handbooks once only, and had not consulted them since (also see Weller, 2001).

Another scenario that results in a narrow understanding of an HoD's work scope is linked to Macbeath's (2005) 'pragmatic' distribution pattern. This is a reactionary model that school leaders may adopt to deal with unexpected demands by resorting to individuals' capability, expertise and reliability who can be 'entrusted with a leadership role and those who can be talked into some form of cooperation' (p.358). The concentration of roles and tasks, which may not necessarily be linked to middle leadership, is evident in school A, and most notably, in school B. For example, while the English HoD in school A is also the head of learning and assessment as well as the assistant HoS, all the HoDs at school B have responsibilities that range from advising students on future educational pathways to assisting the principal with recruiting new teachers (English HoD), to contacting parents, managing parent-

teacher relationships, monitoring homework (maths HoD), to managing student affairs, preparing certificates and minutes, invigilating exams and analysing test results (science HoD). While these activities represent a broadening of the HoD role, they are not 'middle leadership' responsibilities, recalling the 40% and 38% of the HoDs in Weller's (2001) study in the US who respectively reported role expansion and role mismatch between the official statements and the actual expectations.

#### Middle leadership: characteristics

Some of the terms and phrases used by the participants contains behavioural and attitudinal overtones. Basically, a middle leader's job scope can be divided into two categories; knowledge and behaviour. The former can be considered as the 'hardware' of an HoD's job, and the latter is the 'software'. The picture that emerges from the data suggests that concerns about middle leaders' behaviour and attitude outnumber those expressed about their knowledge and expertise. Of the 12 HoDs, only half of them are confidently admired for their knowledge and expertise; these include the science and maths HoDs at school A, the science HoD at school C, and all the HoDs at school D. In contrast, most of them, that is the nine HoDs at schools A, B and C, are blamed, although variously, for their behaviour and attitude.

The evidence from the four schools in this thesis is useful in that it is possible that criticisms of one aspect overshadow another, which in the case of this thesis's findings, is the comparatively higher number of concerns about the HoDs' leadership capability, or lack of it, to subject knowledge. For example, in school A, HoDs are criticised for their lack of willingness to listen. In school B, the

HoDs, most notably the English HoD, are blamed for their negative attitude. In school C, the HoDs, especially the English HoD, are criticised for lack of support and guidance. In contrast, the HoDs at school D are the only leaders who are consistently praised. This is not because they are brilliant leaders or exercise leadership in its most inclusive fashion, but because, being in a new school, they have not yet had the opportunity to abandon the 'safe' line management system to experience the 'less comfortable' domain of active and broad-based consultative leadership, which is characteristically complex and challenging.

This observation tends to confirm Bullock's (1988:62-63) remark which links conflicts and tensions 'experienced by heads of department ... [to] ... expressive or person-centred roles'. It is also consistent with Lambert's (1975:37) finding that the 'expressive-academic' section of his typology is an area which is 'likely to be the source of possible role-conflict'.

The notion of role conflict is not confined to the relationships between the HoDs and the teachers. It equally influences the interactions between the principals and the middle leaders, although the scope is smaller. The most notable example is the case of the English HoD at school B who has been excluded from the senior meetings by the principal due to differences of opinion. The extent of conflict at the other three schools is not as serious as school B, as the concerns expressed are limited to the heads of secondary in schools A, C and D about the science, English and English HoDs respectively. All the reservations are linked to leadership matters.

The evidence about conflicts between HoDs and teachers, as well as HoDs and principals contrasts with Wise & Bush's (1999) findings about departmental loyalty. These authors report that 58.8% of the HoDs in their research chose to ally themselves with their departmental staff compared to 21.7% of influence they tend to accord their senior leaders. The evidence from this thesis does not seem to reflect this. On the contrary, there seems to be more agreement between the HoDs and their senior leaders than between the HoDs and the teachers. The explanation for this discrepancy may be that, unlike these authors' enquiry in public schools, the research in this thesis takes place in *private* schools, at the centre of which lie accountability, fees and parents, which may have convinced the HoDs at all the schools to align themselves with the SMT and not so much with the teachers. This is evident in the more favourable relationships between the middle and senior leaders, than in the case of the middle leaders and their departmental peers.

### **Conflict resolution**

Conflict is an inevitable outcome of differences in opinion between adults in a professional environment. What is of paramount importance are the preventive measures employed to contain conflicts. Equally important are the methods employed to resolve conflicts. The evidence from these case studies provides useful insights. In general, four methods can be identified that the participants use to avoid, minimise or resolve conflicts:

- Absence
- 'HoD-free' solutions
- ICT, and
- Arbiter

### Absence

This is a deliberate attempt by departmental members to avoid unpleasant situations. As observed in school A, for example, those colleagues who experience difficult relationships tend to absent themselves from departmental meetings or the staffroom. Also, teacher isolation is most evident in schools A and D, due to their policy of personally allocated lap-tops, and at school C, due to its 'shopping mall' design.

### 'HoD-free' solutions

This involves three means by which teachers can avoid a direct deal with their HoDs. The first method involves seeking help from colleagues. The second method involves establishing contacts with colleagues in other international schools. The final method involves an online search, the use of which, as explained by a teacher in school B, is contingent upon the nature of the query in that she would consult the Web if the matter in question was not urgent; in the case of urgent matters, she would consult informed colleagues to seek immediate answers.

### ICT

In describing ways to overcome the barriers to broad-based leadership opportunities, Harris (2008:40) suggests using 'ICT-based solutions ... and ... alternative forms of communication'. While this can be a useful method to stay connected, especially in school A, with its split block system, and school D, with its multi-storey system, it can implicitly be used as a way to avoid causing unpleasant situations, or interacting directly with colleagues with whom one may have issues. This is evident in all the schools where connections are made either via email or a mobile

application. In addition, ICT-based solutions can be a contributory factor to teacher isolation, the antithesis of collaborative work culture.

### Arbiter

Another way to avoid unpleasant scenes to occur or even to escalate is to refer a matter of contention to a higher authority. The most notable example of this is reported in school C where a science teacher, having encountered a misunderstanding with a colleague over test papers, asked the HoD to convene a meeting to clarify the confusion. This is a useful example which serves to reinforce the value of line management as highlighted by Muijs & Harris (2007:119) in their reflection on school A where the staff 'had a clear view of who to turn to for the support on certain decisions'.

### **Overview**

This chapter discussed the six themes pertinent to middle leadership; IL, DL, TL, roles, responsibilities and role relationships. Based on this discussion, two reflections can be drawn about IL. The first suggests the possibility of having IL as a standalone feature of schools whose presence can be largely independent of the other themes. Second, as the traditional function of schools, teaching and learning receives considerable attention. This argument, therefore, tends to suggest a distinction between IL and the other themes, the most salient feature of which is the extent of clarity. This research took place in schools which enforce the National Curriculum of England, culminating in the IGCSE. The implicit benefit of this curriculum, and of curricula in general, is the framework they impose on the instructional



aspects of schools, hence great clarity. In contrast, leadership policies and role definitions have been left to the discretion of the schools' administrators, the outcome of which has been incoherence and inconsistency, hence limited clarity. One potential solution to this problem is that schools need to clarify the role boundaries of their staff. This is particularly important in settings with a high staff turnover, as in most international schools.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides answers to the research questions, based on the findings. These questions prompted the researcher to embark on a multiple case study that involved four Malaysian international secondary schools, engaged 52 participants, and lasted over a period of six months. Answering the research questions will comprise the first section of this chapter. The second section discusses the contextual, empirical and theoretical significance of the research. A grounded theory model pertinent to middle leadership will be suggested, followed by an overview to conclude this chapter.

### **Answering the Research Questions**

*What are the roles, responsibilities and role relationships of middle leaders in the selected international schools?*

This question comprises three facets, which are discussed below.

#### Roles

This thesis employed two methods to gain insights into the HoDs' roles; the staff handbooks and the interview materials. The staff handbooks serve to provide standard descriptive job specifications for the HoDs. The examination of these documents, across the four schools, highlights the great attention they pay to teaching and learning, an aspect that is corroborated by the interview data. Nonetheless, documentations about this priority, as well as the other aspects of the HoDs' roles, lack consistent development. The documents at school A are the most complete, detailed and organised; they were observed to have been compiled as a single document and readily available when requested. These positive

features were not present at schools D and C. At school C, for example, the researcher had to request the lesson observation form from several sources, as it was missing from the loosely compiled staff handbook. Documentation is the least developed at school B. Sections pertinent to teaching and learning comprise only a small part; it employs language that is general and ambiguous, and has a template that looks like a contract rather than a staff handbook.

These discrepancies contain the following lessons. First, incoherent role conceptions leave them open to fragmentary and selective interpretations, not only within a single school, but also across the four schools. Second, incoherent role understanding leads to the erratic exercise of middle management, as evident in the four case-study schools. Another factor contributing to the inconsistent role understanding is that participants made few references to the staff handbooks, relying, instead, on their memory or judgement to interpret the role. Despite the growing awareness about the leadership role of the HoDs, most notably at schools A and D, personal perceptions tend to limit the role to that of a middle manager, a policy-taker, rather than a policy-maker, or middle leader. In brief, while the role prioritises teaching and learning, it is arbitrarily interpreted to involve tasks of a managerial nature.

### Responsibilities

An examination of the HoDs' responsibilities across the four schools highlights the importance, and high volume, of activities pertinent to teaching and learning in these schools. These include lesson observations and the evaluation of exam results. There are

two additional points to consider. First, there is considerable overlap between the middle managers' scope of responsibilities in private (international) schools and those at public schools, as shown in the literature (e.g. Lambert, 1975; Wise & Bush, 1999). Second, an aspect specific to private (international) schools concerns parents. There are several references to parents in the staff handbooks and/or minutes, which serve to illustrate their key role as fee-paying 'clients'.

There is a reciprocal relationship between role conceptions and the HoDs' responsibilities. Given the lack of a uniform understanding of the HoDs' roles, individuals tend to rely on personal judgements, preferences or interests to create a 'deviant' job description. Two main parameters cause this divergence; (in)visibility and role overload. Visibility, or lack of it, is used to describe a situation where teachers, instead of consulting the HoDs' formal job descriptions, prefer to define it informally by evaluating the extent to which they see their expectations fulfilled (visibility) or unfulfilled (invisibility). This situation is most likely in settings where staff induction is either not available or not very effective, as in school C. The primary function of an induction programme is to standardise understanding and expectations with a view to achieving consistent practice. The idea of induction was first discussed in school D where the staff were required to undergo a one-month training programme. However, its effectiveness was undermined as some of the expatriate staff, including the participating HoDs in this research, were unable to attend, due to entry delays into Malaysia.

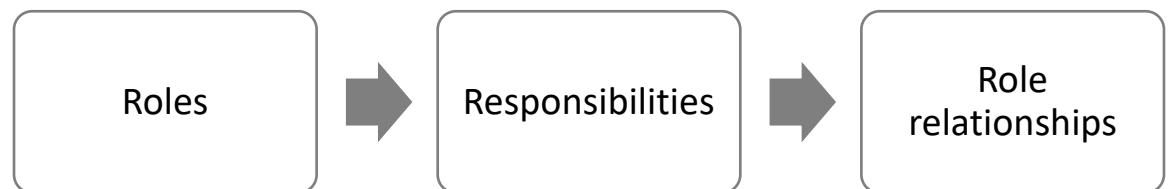
Another contributory factor to a narrow and incomplete conception of an HoD's scope of responsibilities is role overload. Role overload may occur in situations where, in addition to their job description, a middle manager is assigned a responsibility or responsibilities, which may not necessarily involve a task or tasks normally undertaken by them. While this may be a pragmatic response to emerging needs, based on expertise, experience or competence, it has several disadvantages. First, the concentration of roles in the hands of one individual equates it with the deprivation of leadership opportunities for others, most notably the teachers. Second, the delegation of roles to one manager may cause confusion over work priorities. This is most evident at school A where, for the English HoD, her role as the head of learning and assessment has taken centre stage, causing role confusion. In short, while the HoDs' primary responsibility in all the schools concerns safeguarding instructional quality, contextual reservations have created expectations with blurred boundaries, which have impacted on the role relationships between the participants.

### Role relationships

As a result of the 'grey' areas in the HoDs' roles and responsibilities, all the departments across the four schools suffer from conflict, albeit to varying degrees. Dividing the nature of this conflict into criticisms about an HoD's subject knowledge and behaviour, there are more complaints about the latter than the former. The data suggest a 'link' between professional tension in each school and the status of documentation in that school. For example, school B has the least useful documentation; this has created fertile ground for the growth of personally driven agendas,

causing the highest level of tension. A similar situation applies to school C, although to a lesser degree of confusion and dissatisfaction than at school B. However, its divisive 'shopping mall' structure has 'usefully' served to contain the expansion of conflict. Given the more effective documentation in school D, there is a great similarity between this school and school C in that, in school D, the spread of tension has been 'helpfully' hampered by its busy teaching timetable, barely leaving any useful space for micropolitical activities. Surprisingly, although school A has the best organised documentation, it still suffers from a high degree of dissatisfaction, not least because roles are arbitrarily defined and subjectively interpreted, a deviation from the standard definitions and expectations provided in the staff handbooks.

There is a linear relationship between roles, responsibilities and role relationships. Figure 9.1 illustrates this.



*Figure 9.1: The linear relationship between roles, responsibilities and role relationships*

The professional tensions originate from incomplete, arbitrary, fragmentary and selective interpretations of phenomena. As the figure suggests, to bring about consistency, one effective method is to start from 'roles'. Increasing the degree of role clarity makes a positive contribution to decreasing misunderstanding, conflict, tension and feelings of discontent. To sum up, the numerous expressions of resentment in all the schools indicate an unhealthy

professional relationship between and among the participants, emanating from the ill-conceived roles and responsibilities.

*How, and to what extent, are middle leaders involved in the leadership of the selected international schools?*

This question encompasses two dimensions; the 'how' aspect and the 'extent' aspect.

#### Leadership involvement: how?

The manner in which the HoDs find themselves involved in the leadership of their schools is diverse and different from department to department within a single school, and across the four schools. Of the six patterns identified by MacBeath (2005), four can be useful for the purpose of this discussion; formal, pragmatic, incremental and opportunistic (volunteering). Middle management is the epitome of formal involvement via job descriptions and contractual obligations. School A's and B's English HoDs are examples of pragmatic involvement, undertaking multiple responsibilities, which are not necessarily related to middle managers, such as leading learning and assessment in school A, and assisting with the recruitment of teachers in school B. The promotion of a maths teacher to lead her department in school D could be taken to be incremental involvement; the more the successful demonstration of professional capability, the greater the possibility of expanding the scope of responsibilities. The rotation system of appointing HoDs at school C is an example of opportunistic involvement as it requires volunteering for the post at the end of each cycle.

### Leadership involvement: extent?

The extent of the HoDs' leadership involvement is influenced by two factors; the less serious vs. serious dichotomy and the attitude of the principal, most notably at school B. As for the 'less serious' category, the middle managers in all the schools enjoy great autonomy in activities linked to teaching and learning within the domain of the classroom and the department. Their authority, however, is limited for more serious issues such as whole-school decision-making processes. Although the HoDs admitted that they did not have the final say, they were not wholly excluded from consultations. On the contrary, they were consulted, but in a discriminatory fashion, most notably at schools A, D, B and less so at school C. A discriminatory method of consultation involves seeking the views and opinions of one or a selected number of middle managers, while omitting others. Meanwhile, there are indications that, even if the HoDs were granted sufficient autonomy within their departments, they would still prefer to seek permission from their superiors. There are three reasons for this choice; accountability, culture and an attempt to save face in that they would not like to find themselves in an embarrassing situation where a decision finalised at the departmental level is revoked at the senior level.

Another stumbling block restricting the HoDs' access to broad-based leadership opportunities relates to the belief and value systems of the principals. School B's principal's attitude, for example, is a clear indication of the impact of solitary leadership on restricting broad-based leadership opportunities.



*How, and to what extent, are the leadership practices undertaken by the middle leaders linked to teaching and learning in the selected international schools?*

Teaching and learning: how?

Activities linked to teaching and learning constitute the strongest dimensions of the HoDs' responsibilities. These activities are divided into three categories; monitoring, peer observation and CPD. These receive varying degrees of attention. Peer observation is the least developed area. There are two reasons hindering its progress. From an organisational perspective, the heavy workload is a key barrier, as it limits participants' time for participation, as in school D, for example. From a personal point of view, teachers' attitudes, for example at school B, hinder the implementation of this activity. These include feelings of unease, resistance and unwillingness.

There are several other points to consider in respect of peer observation. First, there are variations within and across the schools. For example, while there are conflicting messages about peer observation at school A, there is more consistency at school D. In this latter school, peer observation is most systemically documented, but most systematically practised in the science department of that school. From the 'systemic' point of view, the documents make provision for relief for a middle manager or teacher who would like to embark on peer observation. This is evident in the case of the English HoD whose lesson was covered by the head of secondary so that she could attend her teachers' lessons. From the 'systematic' standpoint, peer observation is scheduled by the science HoD for the teachers to follow. The second reservation relates to the role of micropolitics. In situations

where HoDs do not provide advice, peer observation operates on the basis of arbitrary choice and personal judgements. For example, in school B, a teacher may choose to attend a colleague's lesson on the basis of positive feedback from the students about that teacher; or, in school C, a teacher may prefer to invite a colleague to their lesson whom they are certain can provide honest feedback. In brief, the evidence from the four schools indicates that peer observation is varied, and in need of more systemic development and systematic operation across the board.

A more developed area consists of the activities linked to the professional development of the staff. The evidence in all the schools has served to introduce a typology hinged upon the 'internal/external' logic. Of the four categories, three were reported having been taken place, and these are discussed below. An internally organised and internally delivered CPD was observed to be the most common method, which involves a member of staff, principals in the case of schools C and D, providing training for their staff or colleagues. When the same programme is delivered by a trainer external to the school, this can then be described as internally organised and externally delivered; this was reported in school A where it hosted a programme delivered by a CIE examiner. A maths teacher at school B obtained approval from the SMT to attend training at another school; this CPD is externally organised and externally delivered. There is one important point to consider for externally held CPDs. Although most cases of this type of training were reported to have been sponsored by the school, it is also possible that it is provided in return for a pledge of service. The only evidence for this is the

maths teacher at school B whose attendance at an external event was contingent upon a two-year bond.

The area that receives the most attention is monitoring. A type common to all the schools is formal observation, which is linked to appraisal. This is announced and negotiated in all the schools except B, where it operates on the basis of 'surprise' visits. The rationale for this choice is to preclude the possibility of 'showcase lessons', which was reported in school A. A showcase lesson is an observed practitioner's attempt to impress the observer by deliberately planning and carefully conducting a lesson which departs from the norm routinely followed by that practitioner. The association between formal observations and appraisal has aroused concerns over the quality of the observers' evaluative judgements, as well as over the showcase lessons. Some of the participants express apprehension that an incomplete assessment may deprive them of rewards, which in the case of school A, for example, involves financial bonuses. They are also resentful about showcase lessons, which are perceived to channel the rewards to practitioners of low competence and merit.

Another type of monitoring is informal, which is conducted as 'drop-ins' at school D and known as 'learning walks' at school A. This is not linked to appraisal; instead, it aims to raise awareness about instructional quality within and across the departments. This is a year-round practice, which can greatly reduce the possibility of 'showcase lessons' as it operates on the basis of unannounced visits. As well as formal and informal monitoring, other methods, most notably at school A, include 'checking students' written work' and 'checking all assessments'.

### Teaching and learning: extent?

While these three categories serve to illustrate the 'how' aspect in the question above, the 'extent' aspect is influenced by the 'less serious' argument, as it is strongly linked to the activities taking place within the realm of teaching and learning. This is the area for which the participants claim great autonomy. Recalling that one of the HoDs' frequent complaints is about the shortage of time, accountability to parents has led to instructional monitoring being taken very seriously.

*How, and to what extent, can the practices of middle leaders in the selected international schools be understood through distributed and/or teacher leadership?*

This question encompasses two dimensions; teacher leadership and distributed leadership, which are discussed below.

### Teacher leadership: how?

The evidence from the four schools points to the 'role/task' dichotomy. The 'role' category is formal, and is more likely to be assumed by the HoDs, as formal leaders. The 'task' category, however, is more likely to be carried out by teachers, and this may be short-term, e.g. organising exhibitions or debates, long-term, e.g. conducting exams, one-off, e.g. preparing for the sports day, or routine, e.g. managing pastoral duties, or a combination of these, such as handling reliefs, which is both routine and long term. The 'formal' feature of roles emanates from the manner in which the potential candidates embrace the middle leadership opportunities. In other words, what enables the teachers, as task doers, to assume a leadership position, as role occupants, is *appointment* to this position, which entails a formal process. This is evident in the case of the maths teacher at school D who,

through a formal process, was promoted to lead her department. However, formal roles are not limited to the HoDs; teachers in charge of their homerooms, pastoral care, relief timetabling, etc, perform formal responsibilities, although their remit to take and/or influence decisions may be (far) more limited than that of the HoDs.

#### Teacher leadership: extent?

From a normative point of view, formal teacher leadership creates further opportunities for the formal leaders, the HoDs, to influence the policies of their schools. However, the evidence from these schools points to the contrary. An important precondition for developing the capacity for broad-based leadership is autonomy. However, as the data suggest, the notion of autonomy is linked to the dichotomy of less serious and serious. The participants claim great freedom of action for 'less serious' matters, which are linked to teaching. 'Serious' matters are linked to whole-school policies, for which they have limited autonomy. The extent to which the middle managers, in their capacity as HoDs, are able to exercise their formal teacher leadership roles is confined to the classroom and the department. In short, while there are opportunities for the appointment of teachers to formal leadership roles, the extent to which they are able to exercise their leadership is limited.

#### Distributed leadership: how?

The extension of leadership roles from teacher leadership to distributed leadership requires placing middle leaders in positions of authority. The data from the four schools illustrate the manner in which leadership placements are carried out; formal, pragmatic, incremental and opportunistic (see MacBeath, 2005). Apart from

the 'formal' category, which is manifested in the middle leadership role, the other three categories serve to highlight two points. First, the 'pragmatic' and 'opportunistic' categories reflect the absence of long-term leadership capacity-building programmes, as they comprise responses to emerging needs. This is most evident in schools A and B where, in the former, the HoD leads the learning and assessment undertaking and, in the latter, the HoD assists the principal with teacher recruitment. The weakness of these cases is that they are not sustainable. In other words, if and when these managers depart, there may not be a like-for-like replacement. A more systematic and sustainable method, however, can be achieved through the 'incremental' category. The advantage of this strategy is the possibility it creates for extending leadership opportunities in accordance with a practitioner's leadership calibre, which is likely to develop once s/he succeeds in demonstrating further leadership capability. The second point has direct relevance to the international schools. The presence of 'pragmatic' and 'opportunistic' options reflects the volatile nature of international schools, with high staff turnover and occasional student mobility.

#### Distributed leadership: extent?

The second aspect of the question above concerns the 'extent'. The essential component of distributed leadership, according to this thesis, is autonomy. However, there is strong evidence that all the HoDs, albeit at varying degrees, have insufficient autonomy for 'serious' matters such as the authority to actively participate in, or influence, decision-making processes at their schools, thus, reducing the extent of distributed leadership to that of delegation.

In short, while the HoDs have varied opportunities for leadership, the extent of their remit is limited.

### **Significance of this Study**

The prefix title of this thesis consists of three themes that merit the attention of researchers; middle leadership, Malaysia and international schools. When examined against this growing background, leadership theories such as instructional, distributed and teacher leadership are likely to generate fresh data, leading to new claims. Accordingly, the literature review, findings and analysis chapters of this thesis contain claims which contribute to the significance of this study. The following section discusses significance from three perspectives; contextual, empirical and theoretical.

#### Contextual significance

Studies pertinent to middle leadership and international schools are growing. However, in Malaysia, the evidential base is extremely limited. Therefore, this thesis is a major study of middle leadership in Malaysian international schools, and claims substantial contributions to these areas.

This author was able to identify two English-language studies about middle leadership in Malaysia. One is an enquiry by Ghavifekr et al (2014) in five Chinese primary schools, which has only a modest overlap with the context of this thesis. A more relevant, albeit unpublished, study is by Javadi (2014) on middle leadership in an international school, although on a smaller scale compared to this thesis. This thesis has made appropriate use of both these studies.

### Empirical significance

The limited number of studies in the field of educational leadership in Malaysia indicates a small empirical database in that field and location, particularly in respect of international schools. Therefore, any additions to this database provide valuable inputs. The significant empirical contributions of this thesis are threefold;

- research design
- the relationship between expertise and autonomy (intersectionality)
- the nature of the relationship between expertise and autonomy (expertonomy)

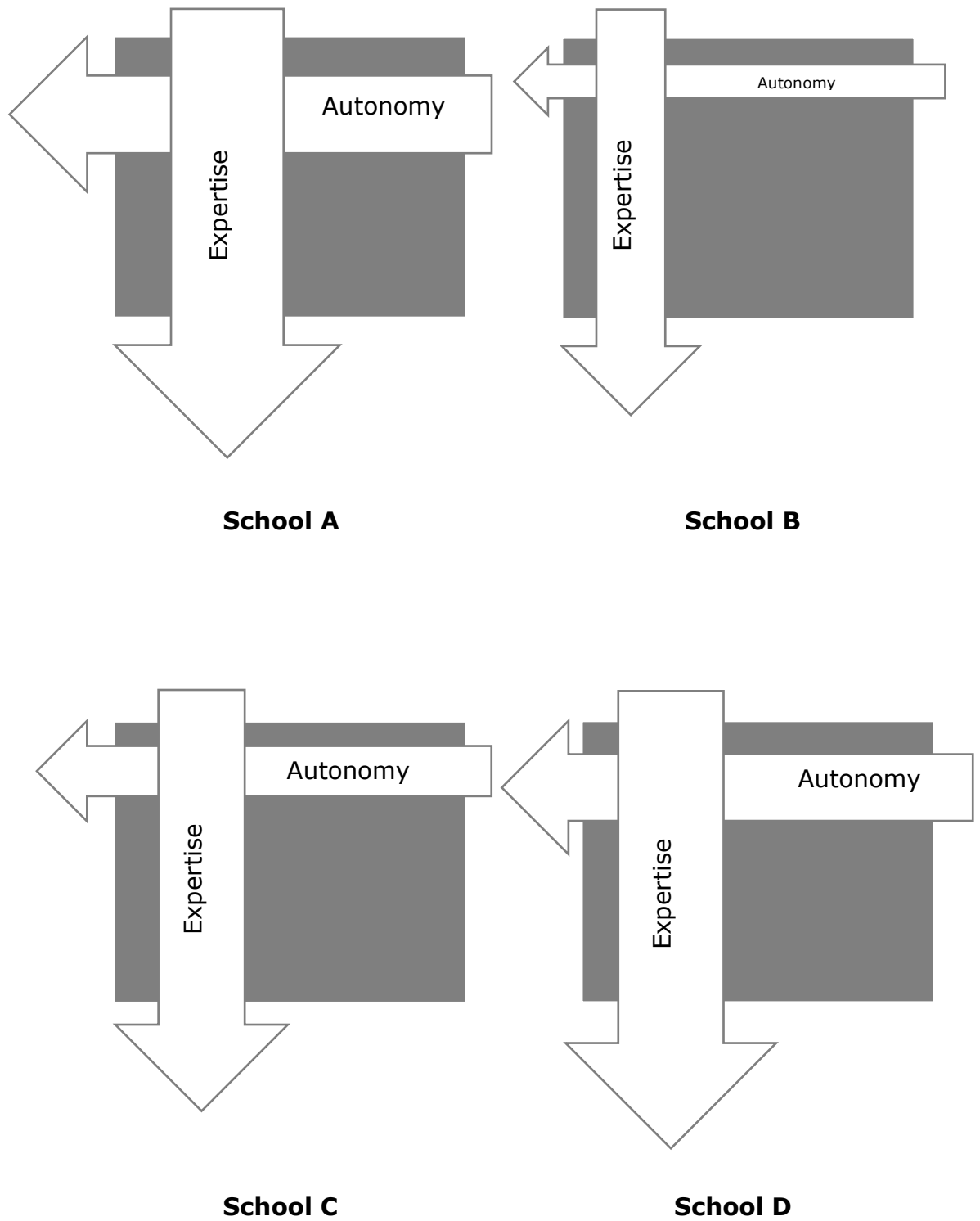
### *Research design*

Although enquiries pertinent to middle leadership are growing, a large proportion of studies are about the principalship and the leadership challenges of international schools. Of those middle leadership studies that were available to this author, none surpasses the scale and scope of the research design employed in this thesis. The multiple case-study approach (methodological triangulation) enabled the engagement of a wide range of practitioners at various levels (respondent triangulation). Semi-structured interviews with all the 52 participants, principals, HoDs and teachers, provided the opportunity for triangulating multi-level evidence, not only within a single department within a single school, but also across the four schools. The ensuing multi-level analyses of these data provide invaluable insights into middle and departmental leadership in international secondary schools, which, in the words of Hayden & Thompson (1997) and Bunnell (2006), have been research evasive.



*The relationship between expertise and autonomy (inter-sectionality)*

Work at any organisation consists of two essential components; expertise and autonomy. In respect of the HoDs at the four schools, the 'expertise' dimension pertains to the subject leaders' knowledge of content, pedagogy and assessment. The 'autonomy' facet is reflected in the extent to which they are allowed to take, influence and implement educative decisions both at the departmental and school levels. The evidence from the four case-study schools suggests that, while the HoDs enjoy relatively great autonomy for matters linked to teaching, introduced in this thesis as 'less serious' (departmental level), they have less autonomy, albeit to different degrees, for matters which pertain to policies (whole-school level). The formal role of the HoDs in these international schools requires that they have a say in matters at the school level, which this thesis introduces as 'serious'. Thus, any references to 'autonomy' are intended to mean freedom of action at *school* level. Figure 9.2 illustrates inter-sectionality, and its variant forms, in all the four case-study schools.



*Figure 9.2: Inter-sectionality at the four case-study schools*

These figures illustrate the status of inter-sectionality in each school. Two points about the arrows are worth attention. First, the width of each arrow denotes the quality of that dimension. School A, for example, has the most organised instructional practice with the greatest autonomy among all the schools. School B is the weakest in both dimensions, with autonomy at the lowest level. The 'instruction' dimension at school C enjoys a stronger status than its 'autonomy'. Instruction at school D is as effective as at school A, with autonomy at a slightly lower level than that of school A. Second, the downward direction of the arrows represents the top-down nature of instructional activities at these schools. These figures also lead to two reflections, which are discussed below.

First, it is possible to have varying degrees of 'expertise' and 'autonomy' within a single school, as evident in all the four case-study schools. Second, it is possible to have cross-context variations, with some schools closer to symmetry between 'expertise' and 'autonomy'. For example, there is a relatively high measure of correspondence between 'expertise' and 'autonomy' in school A, the degree of which decreases in respect of schools D, C and B.

*The nature of the relationship between expertise and autonomy (expertonomy)*

The nature of expertise and autonomy in this thesis is introduced as 'expertonomy'. It examines the types of emotional responses associated with the presence or absence of both these constructs, or the presence of one construct in the view of the absence of another. The interview evidence in all the schools, albeit the least

at school D, suggests that most of the HoDs are disappointed with the amount of their autonomy, not at the departmental level, but at the whole-school level.

The body of literature on DL makes numerous explicit references to 'expertise' (e.g. Bennett et al, 2003a) alongside terms such as skills, potential and abilities (e.g. Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005). However, although expertise is a precondition for DL, it is not sufficient. To enable professionals to apply their expertise, it is equally vital to grant them the autonomy to do so. Inferences, grounded in the interview data, lead to the following typology that can potentially redefine DL (see figure 9.3).

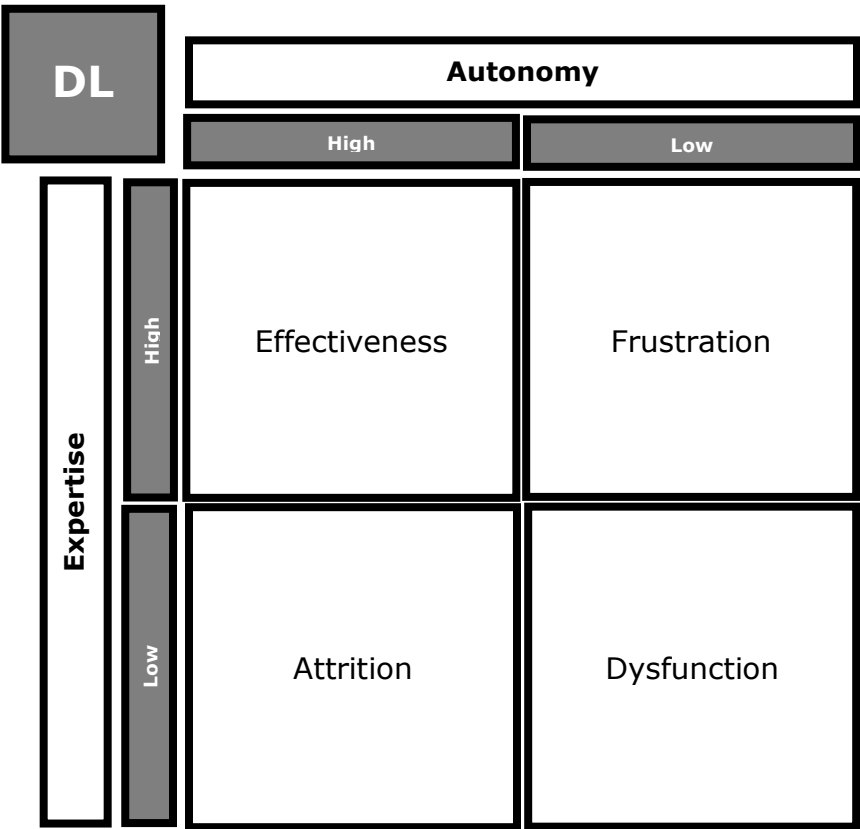


Figure 9.3: Distributed leadership expertise/autonomy taxonomy

Figure 9.3 illustrates the manner in which expertise and autonomy engage, the fusion of which suggests the coined term, 'expertonomy'. In this model, high expertise/high autonomy is the optimum amalgam as professionals are given the space to utilise their knowledge. In this sense, DL encompasses many features found in collegiality (Bush, 2003b), such as shared decision-making and consensus (Bush, 2011:72). Collegiality also recognises the value of 'expertise', with teachers possessing 'an *authority of expertise*' (Bush, 2003b:65 original emphases). However, heads may be reluctant to embrace DL or collegiality, believing that teachers 'do not have the expertise to make valuable contributions' (Brown, Boyle & Boyle, 1999:319).

Low expertise/high autonomy results in 'attrition' because individuals are left with abundant space but limited knowledge to advance the organisational goals. It is important to note that teachers do not lack knowledge in the true sense of the word. However, the salient feature of this quartile is that the practitioners' skills and knowledge have been subjected to 'stagnation' in that, due to the passage of time, they fail to develop themselves. The outcome of this combination is more reliance on experience and less dependence on informed knowledge, which recalls Bush's (2003b) discussion of the limitations implicit in relying on experience at the expense of theory; drawing on common-sense, inevitably creates an environment replete with bargaining and lobbying where 'interest groups develop and form alliances in pursuit of particular policy objectives' (Ibid: 89).

The third blend points to high expertise/low autonomy where professionals view themselves caught in a tangled web of bureaucratic relationships with their capacities subsumed under the weighty might of structure. This strand resembles formal models in being hierarchical (Bush, 2003b). However, formal models do not ignore expertise, but deploy it in a different way. For instance, structural models posit that 'specialisation permits higher levels of individual expertise and performance' (Bolman & Deal, 1991:48). Similarly, bureaucratic models suggest a 'division of labour with staff specialisation in particular tasks on the basis of expertise' (Bush, 2003b:44). But, they offer very little scope for autonomy in that, contrary to the notion of DL that considers teacher engagement in the process of learning an essential (and not a redundant) prerequisite for school effectiveness (Robinson, 2008), formal models take a narrow stance by emphasising 'individual', 'division', and 'particular'. Such (mis)conceptions tend to be congruent with hierarchical models where too much emphasis on rationality and structure may propel the organisation towards the precipice of managerialism, the very 'dark side' of DL (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008). In his English-based research, Southworth (2002:86) found that a deputy headteacher was a 'frustrating role', partly due to 'the lack of opportunities to exercise leadership or to develop their skills within the school'.

The antithesis of this feeling, as suggested by Bush (2011), is collegiality and teacher autonomy, the combination of which may lead to 'effectiveness', as noted in the taxonomy. The final quartile (dysfunction), though (very) unlikely, fails to draw on the available expertise and provide autonomy to advance the goals of the organisation.

As the interview data suggest, frustration occurs at the interface between 'high' expertise and 'low' autonomy, which applies to most of the participating HoDs. Figure 9.4 illustrates this relationship.

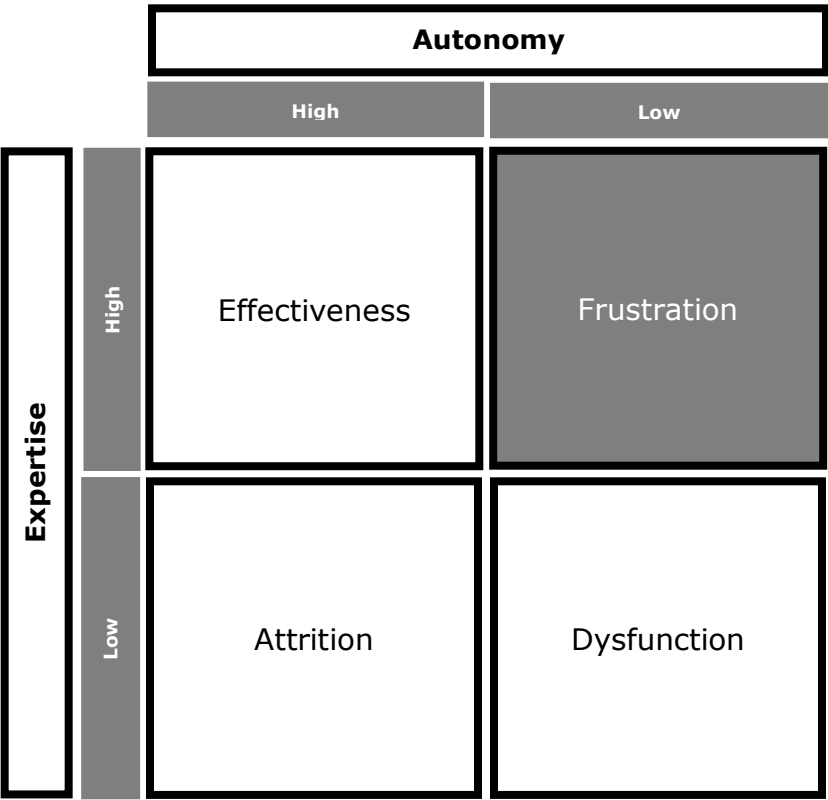


Figure 9.4: The interplay between expertise and autonomy (expertonomy)

The shaded quartile demonstrates the interplay between 'high' expertise and 'low' autonomy, and their leading to frustration with regard to whole-school key policies. No evidence of 'attrition' or 'dysfunction' at classroom, departmental or school levels were found, although there are powerful indications of 'effectiveness' at classroom and, to a lesser degree, at departmental levels only. Both inter-sectionality and expertonomy are two sides of the same coin. While the former examines the *presence* of expertise and autonomy, the latter studies the *nature* of their interaction.

### Theoretical significance

This thesis presents departmental culture as its significant theoretical contribution. Departmental culture is a subordinate concept to that of school ethos. This sub-culture, as demonstrated by data gathered through observations, suggests models of behaviour, introduced below.

- Island & shopping mall
- Solar system
- Magnet
- Bicycle wheel

### *The island and shopping mall models*

The island model is evident in the English department at school A. The prominent feature of an island is its isolation. There are three locations where the members of this department were observed spending their non-contact hours; in the classroom, in the secondary head's office and in the staffroom. The majority of the English teachers were observed spending their time in the classrooms at their personally allocated laptops. Very few of them chose to visit their departmental desk in the staffroom. The HoD herself, perhaps due to her multiple roles, was observed spending much of her time in the head of secondary's office. This description serves to visualise an island, or rather a group of islands – an archipelago – whose salient features are isolation and separation.

An alternative model that overlaps considerably with the island model is Hargreaves' (1994:28) 'shopping mall'. This is evident in schools which operate on the basis of line management, most visibly at school C and less so at school D. The striking feature of school C is the manner in which the practitioners started their day. They were observed, early in the morning, to approach their



classrooms with a key in hand to unlock the door for the students to enter. This behaviour was not limited to the teachers; the head of secondary was seen doing so, as well. The key characteristic of the 'shopping mall' model is isolation until a need arises. This need arose at school C following a misunderstanding between a senior science teacher and her younger colleague about the template of test papers. To respond to this need, and in contrast to the 'shopping mall's' principle of isolation, a meeting was convened at the science lab in which all the secondary science teachers, led by the HoD, engaged in a debate to agree on a consistent template. Both the 'island' and the 'shopping mall' models have many features in common, one of which is this refrain; isolation and separation.

#### *The solar system model*

The science department at school A is a good example of the solar system model. The main characteristic of this model lies in its asymmetrical balance. The researcher's observations showed that the science HoD occupied a spot at the departmental desk where he would almost always engage himself in conversations with a select group of teachers. Although the frequency of visits to the staffroom was higher among the science teachers than the English teachers, the HoD would behave in a way that would resonate with the solar system whereby, the sun, as the centre of the system, is positioned at an asymmetrical distance from the planets that orbit around it. In this way, positioning oneself within the perimeter of the HoD becomes a critical issue, as any miscalculation can cause disruption to the flow of the sun's rays, a metaphor for the HoD's favours. Conversations with this HoD and his assistant, or 'ally', confirms the key role of micropolitics in

this department, the clear example of which is a year 8 science project in which four teachers were involved, but only two exhibited commitment. Based on this attitude, the science HoD had decided to indulge in more frequent interactions with the two 'committed' teachers, and ignore the other two, whose lack of effort had convinced the HoD to deprive them of his 'favours'.

#### *The magnet model*

This is a model that resonates greatly with the maths department at school A. The distinguishing feature of this department is its ability to attract a few and repel many. It is exactly this quality that distinguishes this model from the previous model. In the solar system model, there were a few teachers who would regularly visit their departmental desk; however, their presence was overlooked as the HoD preferred to interact with his inner circle. The magnet model, however, suggests the attraction of a few teachers to the departmental desk, and the rejection of the rest. In other words, all the teachers who chose to visit the maths department were observed to be welcomed by the HoD; those who were rejected, or rather thought that they would be rejected, would not come to the staffroom at all. Alternatively, they preferred to spend their time in their classrooms.

#### *The bicycle wheel model*

The salient feature of a bicycle wheel lies in its centrality function, which was reinforced by the principal at school B to whom all attention was directed. In this model, a bicycle wheel consists of four components; a rim, a hub, the spokes and the beads. The hub of the wheel, the school, is occupied by the principal. Each spoke represents a line of communication along which the beads,

or the practitioners, are asymmetrically positioned. The rim represents the main supporting structure of the wheel holding all the components together, a role played by the students and their fee-paying parents.

This metaphorical description contains two reservations. First, the bicycle wheel model operates in settings where middle leadership is poorly defined and understood, as is the case with school B. This lack of a departmental support system necessitates establishing contacts with the principal for information, clarification or updates. The outcome of the individual contacts is an increase in the workload of the principal, and a likely fate that befell the principal in Lynch's (2012:35) study who managed to cope with a heavy workload for seven years, only to retire prematurely on health grounds. The second reservation concerns the troubled relationship between the principal and the English HoD. Because the principal is at the centre of all the activities of the school, having a positive relationship with her is vital. However, this is not the case with the English HoD who reports unpleasant experiences in his professional relationships with the principal. Although he has fallen from favour, he has not fallen from position. This has become possible via the 'rim' function, the students and parents, whose power base makes any radical change to the staffing difficult, mainly due to the accountability pressures that the principal feels in relation to her 'customers'.

Speaking about a wheel should not lead us to ignore the big picture, the bicycle. The metaphor of bicycle represents the owners of the international schools, to whom the wheel is attached and on whom it relies to function. This cohort illustrates a parallel,

or perhaps a shadow, power base with whom principals in private international schools have to engage. The power of this cohort, the founders or directors, is often cited as the reason behind the frequent leadership changes in international schools. In the mid-1990s, for example, Hawley (1994) found that the principals of international schools in the US would not stay beyond three years, a finding that is confirmed, two decades later, in Javadi's (2014) study in Malaysia. The complexity of relationships between the school owners, and the professional staff, is apparent in school C when a teacher claimed that the HoDs received their orders from the owners rather than the head of secondary, suggesting a 'backchannel' mechanism in place at international schools. The leadership challenges at international schools highlight this point that a bicycle with a faulty hub, the principal, is as ineffective as a hub with a dysfunctional bicycle, the owners – a reciprocal relationship that magnifies complications with the addition of the rim, the spokes and the beads.

The educational leadership literature contains numerous studies that engage with organisational culture at school level. This empirical contribution is an attempt to introduce cultural nuances at *departmental* level.

### **Grounded Theory Model: From Middle Management to Middle Leadership**

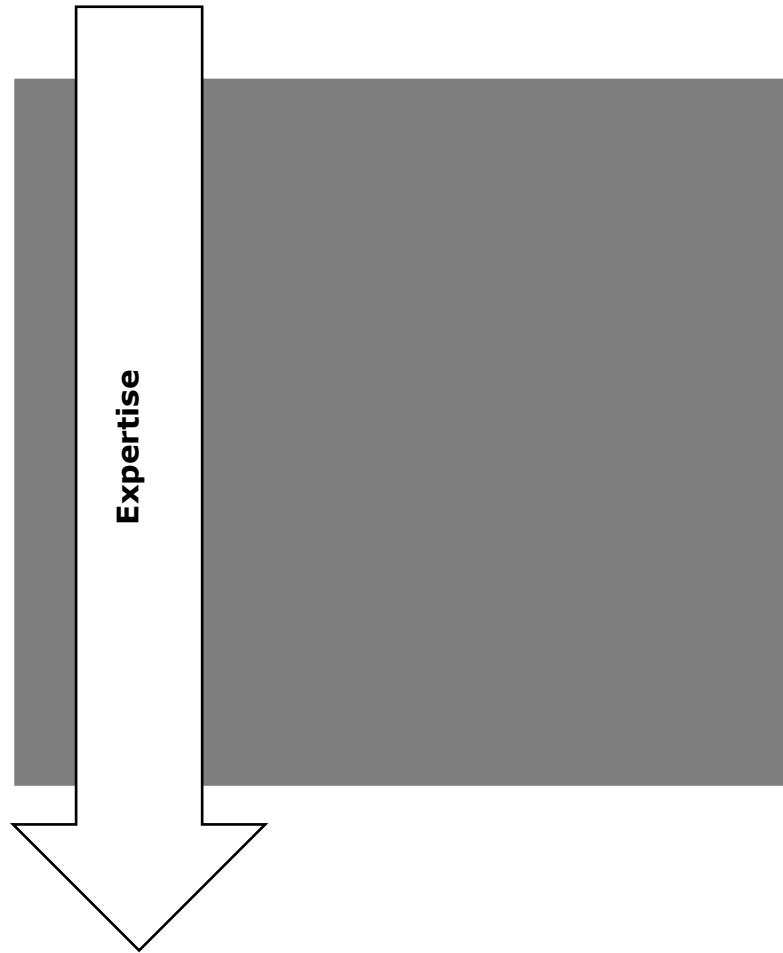
At the beginning of this thesis, a question is asked to clarify the distinction between middle management and middle leadership. This question was posed in the pre-data collection stage, when, to provide a response, the author had to rely on theoretical arguments which distinguish between a period of middle management and an emerging era of middle leadership (e.g.

Busher & Harris, 1999; Bush, 2003b; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007). In the light of the empirical data collected from these four international secondary schools, it can now be claimed that a formula has been found to assist with the shift from middle management to middle leadership. To achieve this transition, the following properties in the equation below must be present:

**High Expertise + High Autonomy**

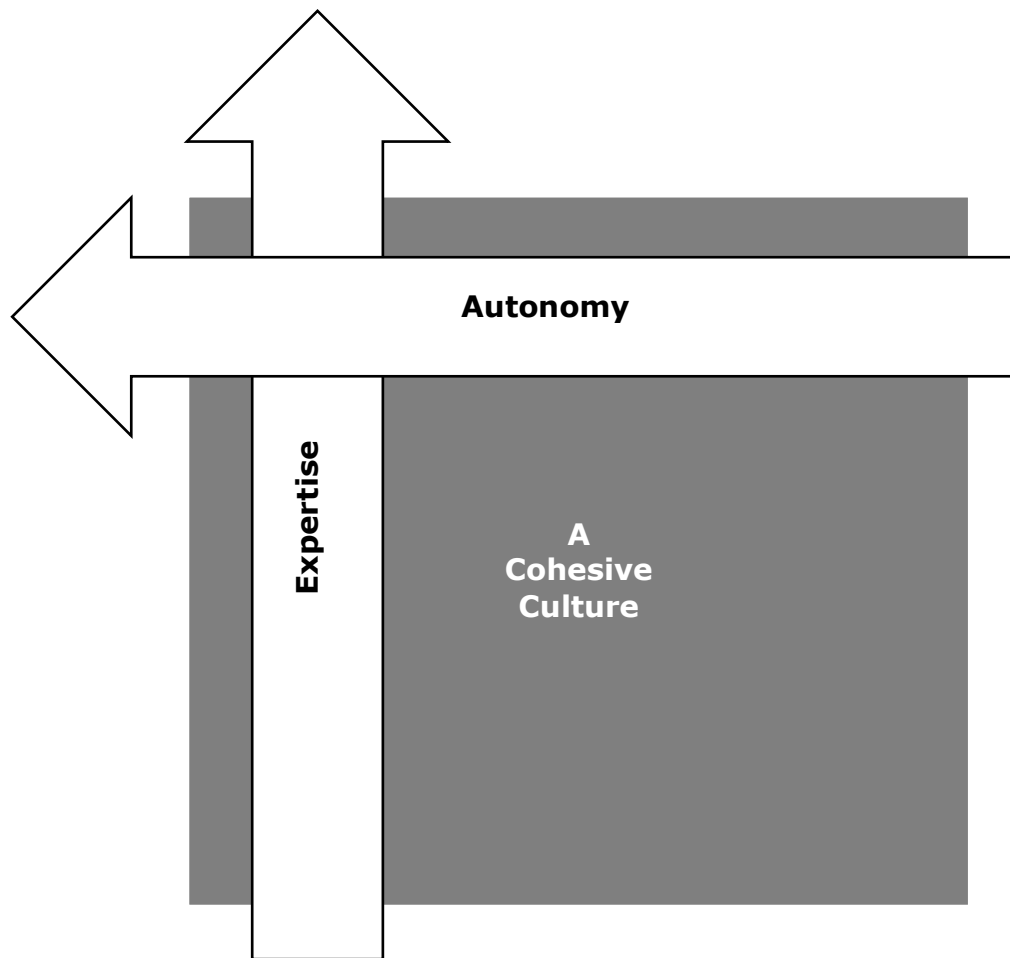
*Figure 9.5: The middle leadership formula*

'Expertise' pertains to all the instructional activities. It is not wholly equivalent to instructional leadership, as is the case with the schools in this thesis. What they represent is instructional leadership in fragments. For example, all the schools have formal monitoring programmes, albeit at varying degrees of effectiveness, but they all lack Hallinger & Murphy's (1985) notion of 'maintaining high visibility', as examples of isolation are prevalent. Any 'middle' activities pertinent to this dimension may be regarded as equivalent to middle management whereby middle managers ensure the successful implementation of the educative mandates that descend from the 'top'. Leadership in this situation is not distributed (see Harris, 2003a; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) but 'devolved' (Bolden et al, 2009) or 'restricted' (Muijs & Harris, 2007), 'nearer the beginning of the journey towards DL' (Ritchie & Woods, 2007:376), as evident in these selected international schools. Figure 9.6 illustrates a visual conceptualisation of middle management in this guise.



*Figure 9.6: Middle management*

To move from middle management to middle leadership, it is essential to follow the proposed formula above, which results in the visual conceptualisation of figure 9.7.

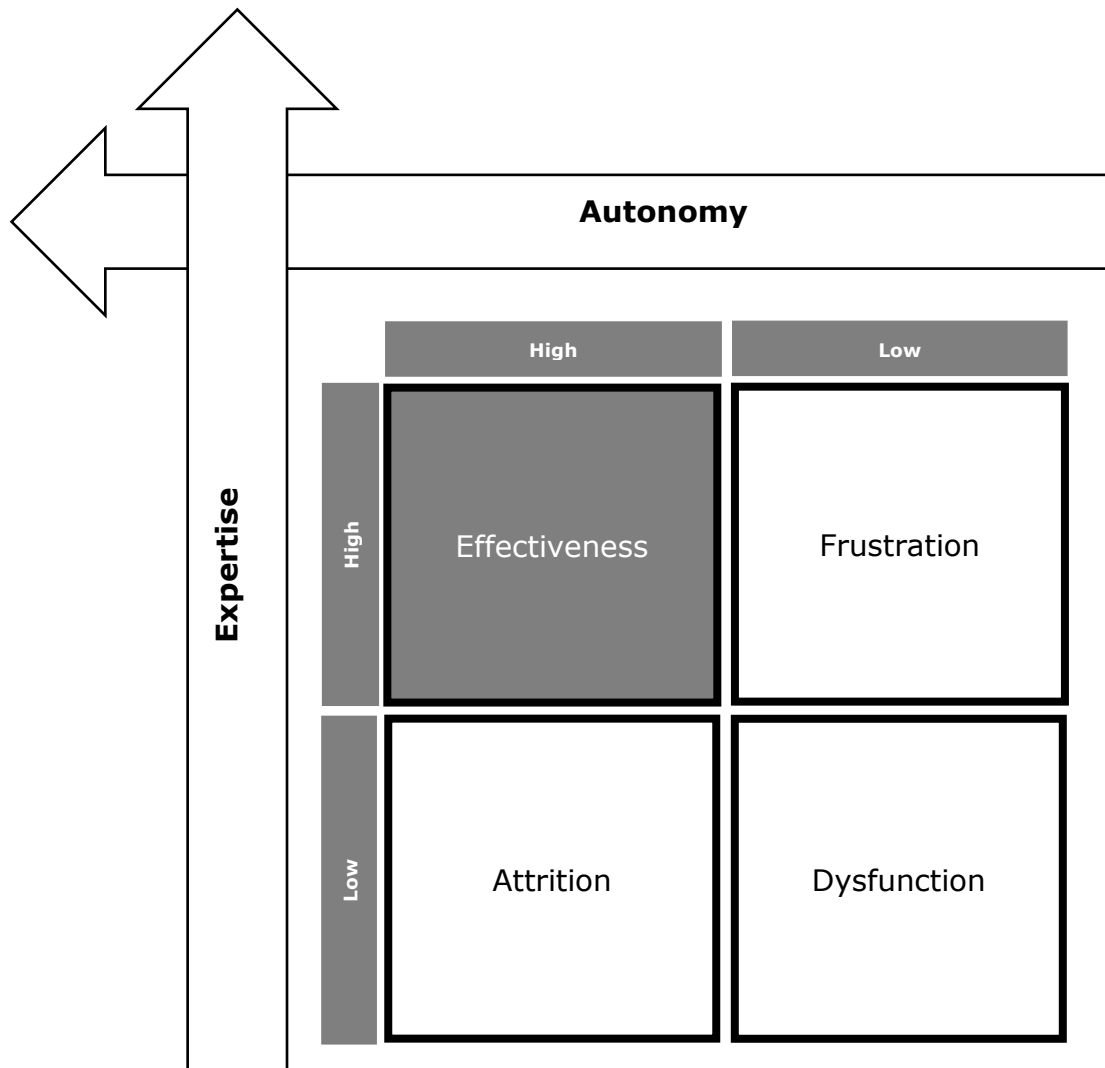


*Figure 9.7: Middle leadership*

The vertical, upward arrow represents expertise (instructional activities), and the horizontal arrow represents autonomy, which permits the practitioners to exercise leadership, as opposed to management. The dark background shows the culture of the school, positively shaped by effective documentation and induction, both at departmental and school levels. A key feature of the model in figure 9.7 concerns the width of the arrows. Symmetrical widths exhibit a positive relationship between 'expertise' and 'autonomy', the two essential constructs of middle leadership. This latter point merits further attention, which follows.

This proposed model contains the notions of inter-sectionality and expertonomy, which were discussed above. Inter-sectionality is represented via the presence of the two arrows, and expertonomy is illustrated by the widths of the arrows. While the absence of the 'autonomy' arrow will disqualify the 'leadership' and inter-sectionality properties of the model, varied widths of the arrows show disrupted equilibrium between 'expertise' and 'autonomy'. This latter reservation is displayed in the multiple illustrations in figure 9.2. Thus, this discussion suggests an inextricable connection between middle leadership, inter-sectionality and expertonomy. The following figure captures all these themes within a single illustration.





*Figure 9.8: The single illustration of middle leadership, intersectionality & expertonomy*

The crossing of the symmetrical arrows of 'expertise' and 'autonomy', meeting at the point of 'effectiveness', can provide the opportunity of a transit from middle management to middle leadership, the effectiveness of which is equally hinged upon attention to creating a cohesive culture, enabled through effective documentation and induction for all.

## **Limitations of the Research**

This research examined middle leadership in four selected international secondary schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Thus, the limitations of this research include the geographical considerations, the sample size, and the type of sites.

With regard to the geographical considerations, focusing on international schools in Kuala Lumpur only may not provide a holistic picture of middle leadership in *all* schools of such type across the country. However, in contrast to the ethnic diversity for which Malaysia is known for, in terms of managerial practice, it is a fairly homogenous country, and thus, shifts the focus of concerns from geographical location to contextual variables, as evident in the leadership of school B in contrast to that of schools A, C and D, albeit in the same territory.

The small sample size of four schools, exhibiting varying practices of leadership, too, is another constraint, which renders generalisation difficult. This concern, however, is partly addressed by the 52 interviews, which took place between the four schools, boosting the 'depth' aspect vis-à-vis the 'breadth', with a view to fulfilling Lincoln & Guba's (2000) notion of 'fittingness'.

Finally, as explained at the outset, international schools possess diverse characteristics, ranging from staff and student population, to curriculum, to educational goals, etc. This study was conducted in international secondary schools that offer the UK curriculum, and are predominantly staffed by Malaysians. Hence, caution needs to be exercised when extending the findings of this study to international schools that may share similar features, and even

greater caution is required in extending the findings to international schools that may not possess similar characteristics, e.g. a larger expatriate staff population vis-à-vis the local, or a different curriculum, e.g. IB.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This thesis introduces several main themes. The first theme addresses the distinctions made between 'serious', related to the whole-school matters, and 'less serious', related to the classroom/departmental matters. It would be useful to understand whether such divisions exist in other contexts.

On a related note, this thesis discusses the multiple intersections between expertise and autonomy (expertonomy). The findings suggest that the inverse relationship between these two constructs, high expertise and low autonomy, causes frustration among the HoDs. It would be interesting to investigate this claim, and other combinations, further for validation, refutation or modification.

Thirdly, the data suggest a linear connection between poorly defined middle leadership roles, poorly articulated middle leadership responsibilities, and troubled relationships in academic departments. It would be useful to subject this claim to further scrutiny.

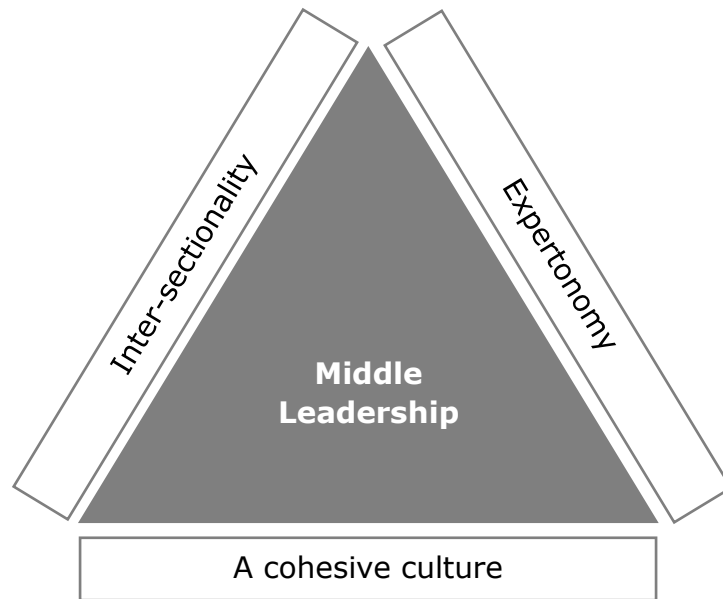
Fourthly, parallel developments between distributed *and* teacher leadership, in terms of the extent of autonomy, models of leadership distribution, and barriers can be discerned. It would be interesting to probe this inference more seriously in subsequent studies.

Finally, the findings suggest four types of departmental culture. It would be useful to explore these patterns in other settings to learn whether similar behavioural norms exist, or there are new patterns to be introduced.

### **Overview**

This chapter tried to provide answers to the research questions, and to set in perspective the significance of these answers against the backdrop of the broader literature on educational leadership. This thesis is the first major study of middle leadership in international secondary schools in Malaysia, and thus, claims significant contextual, empirical and theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge on educational leadership.

The notions introduced in this chapter and, by extension, in this thesis, are not wholly novel. There is literature on the importance of expertise (e.g. Bennett et al, 2003a; Harris, 2004; Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005) and autonomy (e.g. Chapman et al, 2007; Harris, 2010). The main contribution of this thesis is the coalescence of these strands into a single grounded theory model of middle leadership, which encompasses the essential notions of inter-sectionality, expertonomy and a cohesive culture. Figure 9.9 captures this theoretical framework.



*Figure 9.9: The encapsulation of middle leadership and its essential notions*

The grand picture of middle leadership at these four schools contains the following reflections. First, it is inappropriate to use the epithet 'leadership' to speak of the 'middle' activities at these schools. It is more sensible to describe them as 'management'. Second, this thesis is sceptical that using 'international' to refer to these schools makes any significantly different claims about the instructional and managerial operations at these four schools. Third, international schools are distinct from public schools in terms of their statutory status, their ownership and the bold presence of parents, as fee-paying 'customers'. Finally, the proposed middle leadership notions of inter-sectionality, expertonomy and a cohesive culture can benefit senior managers of international schools, if they intend to lead their schools, middle managers, if they wish to lead their departments, teachers, if they aspire to leadership roles, and international school owners, if they would like to see their schools flourish.

The main argument in this thesis is the balance between individual autonomy and collective autonomy (see Mayrowetz et al, 2007). According to the data, individual autonomy is reflected in the 'less serious' category where teachers, in their comfort zone of isolation, find themselves engaged in teaching and dealing with 'children'. The collective autonomy, on the other hand, manifests itself, though feebly, in the 'serious' category where practitioners are expected to play an effective role in decision-making processes and formulating policies for their school. The grand picture inclines to tip the balance in favour of individual autonomy and against collective autonomy. This contrasts with Bush's (2011) demand for equilibrium between the two, suggesting that the individual instructional autonomy in the classroom, and the collective leadership autonomy outside the classroom (expertonomy), need to operate in tandem (inter-sectionality) within a cohesive culture, forged through effective documentation and induction for all.

There are useful lessons in this thesis for researchers to reflect upon and for practitioners to act upon. In an era of fast-moving developments, 'impermanence' (Gronn, 2003a), diversity, unpredictability, ambiguity, increased workloads and mounting accountability pressures, it is best for solo and shared leadership to co-exist. Calling the former leadership style 'heroic', Gronn (2010) introduces the notion of hybridity in educational leadership, and suggests that 'heroic and distributed understandings may be, and indeed need to be, brought together and subsumed under the idea of "hybrid" practice' (p.70). Excessive attention to solitary principal leadership will not lead to any better fate than that of Lynch's (2012) ill-fated principal, i.e.

premature resignation or retirement, possibly on health grounds. Shared leadership, in the form of middle management, will in all likelihood generate feelings of frustration and undermine performance, if not increase the already high staff turnover at international schools. The 'hybrid' existence of solo and shared leadership is effective only upon the proportional provision of autonomy vis-à-vis expertise for the middle leaders, whom, after all, are situated at the intersection of instructional, distributed and teacher leadership.

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## **Appendices**

<b>Appendix A</b>	The Study Protocol,	408
<b>Appendix B</b>	Research Information for All Participants,	410
<b>Appendix C</b>	Consent Form for All Participants,	412
<b>Appendix D</b>	HoDs' Modified Interview Guide,	414
<b>Appendix E</b>	Principals' Modified Interview Guide,	416
<b>Appendix F</b>	Subject Teachers' Modified Interview Guide,	418
<b>Appendix G</b>	Observation Schedule (Departmental Meetings),	420
<b>Appendix H</b>	Observation Schedule (Staff Meetings),	421

## Appendix A: The Study Protocol

### ► Study Protocol

#### 1. Topic

Middle Leadership in Malaysian International Secondary Schools: The Intersection of Instructional, Distributed and Teacher Leadership.

#### 2. Background information

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the role of middle leadership, with an increasing number of enquiries recognising the importance of middle leadership in schools. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the working life has become more challenging and complex. Therefore, school principals are no longer able to single-handedly manage their schools. It is exactly at this juncture that middle leadership gains prominence.

#### 3. Purpose

This enquiry intends to study middle leadership in four international secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory, Malaysia. Both these areas of education remain under-researched, which merits further exploration. As the title implies, middle leadership takes place at the inter-section of three popular educational leadership theories; instructional, distributed and teacher leadership, adding further significance to this research.

#### 4. Methodology

##### 4.1 Research design

This is an embedded multiple case-study, which employs three methods; interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

##### 4.2 Participants

Semi-structured interviews will take place with 52 potential participants in the four schools: three HoDs of English, maths and science; three teachers from each department, and the principals of each school.

##### 4.3 Data collection

Data collection begins at the outset of the 2015/6 Academic Year in September. The researcher is planning a three-week stay at each site. Data collection may last for the whole Academic Year of 2015/6.

#### 5. Ethical considerations

The researcher intends to minimise and, if possible, eliminate all traces that may help identify a school or a participant. Thus, all subject attributes will be deleted from quotations, e.g. Maths

Teacher/Head of Department. Names of schools will be replaced by School A, B, C, and D. Although it appears virtually impossible to hide the identities of the principals, this can be successfully achieved by hiding the identities of the schools.

## **6. Attachments**

This document contains the following:

- i) Interview instruments for all the participants
- ii) Observation schedules
- iii) Consent form
- iv) Contact details
- v) Ethics form

## Appendix B: Research Information for All Participants

### ▶ Information Interview Participant

Researcher

**Vahid Javadi**  
The University of Nottingham

Dear Madam/Sir

I am a PhD candidate at the School of Education, University Of Nottingham. I am pursuing a research project leading to a thesis. The research project is entitled:

#### **Middle Leadership in International Schools: The Intersection of Instructional, Distributed and Teacher Leadership**

The middle leaders are defined as those practitioners who lead academic departments in their capacity as heads of department. Thus, the focus of this research is to study the roles and responsibilities of these heads as well as the circumstances that characterise their leadership roles.

I would like to seek your cooperation by participating in a one-to-one interview. I hope you will find that this is a worthwhile area of research and agree to cooperate in the interview. The responses collected from the interview will form the basis of my research project. The interview will be audio taped and I would ensure anonymity of your contribution in the interview. The interview would take about 45 minutes and would be at a time suitable to you. I would tape the interview, subject to your agreement, to allow for correct transcription.

I emphasise strongly here that the information obtained will be used in the strictest confidence. All documentation relating to this study would have pseudonyms used in order to protect the identities of the participants. You will not be identified at any stage in this study. All material collected will be kept confidential. No other person besides me and my supervisors will be able to see and access the audio copy and transcript of the interview.

If you would wish or agree to participate in the interview, kindly fill in the attached consent form. You have the right to decline and doing so will not affect the research or your position in your organisation. I thank you for taking time in reading this information sheet.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the research project, please contact my supervisors at:

<b>First supervisor</b>	<b>Professor Tony Bush</b> School of Education, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, Jalan Broga, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor E-mail: Tony.Bush@nottingham.edu.my
<b>Second supervisor</b>	<b>Dr Ashley Ng Yoon Mooi AMN</b> Assistant Professor, Programme Coordinator for MA Educational Leadership and Management, School of Education, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, Jalan Broga, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor E-mail: Ashley.Ng@nottingham.edu.my Telephone: +60 (3) 8725 3582(direct line) Room: B1B06

## Appendix C: Consent Form for All Participants

### Consent Form | Interview Participant

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Vahid Javadi</b>
<b>Thesis title</b>	<b>Middle Leadership in International Schools: The Intersection of Instructional, Distributed and Teacher Leadership</b>
<b>Supervisors</b>	<b>Prof. Tony Bush Dr Ashley Ng</b>

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I have the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction
- I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project (before interview and transcription is complete) without having to give reasons or without penalty of any sort.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I also understand that any information I provide in the interview will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors. I am aware that the published results will not use my name and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me as participant of this study. I also understand that the tape recording of the interview and also the full transcription of the interview will be kept secure at all times. I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisors if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

**Signed (participant)**.....

**Print name** ..... **Date** .....



## Contact Details | Supervisors & Researcher

<b>First supervisor</b>	<b>Professor Tony Bush</b> School of Education, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, Jalan Broga, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor E-mail: Tony.Bush@nottingham.edu.my
<b>Second supervisor</b>	<b>Dr Ashley Ng Yoon Mooi AMN</b> Assistant Professor, Programme Coordinator for MA Educational Leadership and Management, School of Education, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, Jalan Broga, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor E.mail: Ashley.Ng@nottingham.edu.my Telephone: +60 (3) 8725 3582(direct line) Room: B1B06
<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Vahid Javadi</b> Email: kabx4vja@nottingham.edu.my Telephone: +60 17 39 41 421

## Appendix D: HoDs' Modified Interview Guide

### ► Head of Department

#### Roles and role relationships

1. As the head of department, how do you define your role in this school?
2. What is your understanding of your role?
  - [Why?]
3. How is your relationship with the management team?
  - [Why?]
4. How is your relationship with the subject teachers you lead?
  - [Why?]

#### Leadership involvement

5. What are your responsibilities in your department?
  - [Autonomy?]
6. Do you have any responsibilities that relate to the whole school?
  - [What?]
  - [Autonomy?]

<b><i>Consultation</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>	<b><i>Implementation</i></b>
<i>Whole-school policies</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Authority</i>
<i>Development plans</i>	<i>Process</i>	
<i>Timetabling</i>	<i>Final decision</i>	
<i>Resource allocation</i>		
<i>School vision development</i>		
<i>Curriculum</i>		
➤ <i>Consultation process</i>		

7. To what extent do you involve the subject teachers you lead in the leadership of your department?
  - [What responsibilities?]
  - [Autonomy?]

## Instructional engagement

8. To what extent are you involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in your department?

➤ [Process]

---

### *Instructional mechanisms*

---

<i>Lesson observation</i>	<i>Feedback</i>	<i>Modelling</i>
<i>Professional development</i>	<i>Training</i>	<i>Coaching &amp; mentoring</i>

➤ [Barriers?]

## Opinions & feelings

9. How knowledgeable are you in the subject you lead?

10. How much autonomy do you have in leading your department?

11. How do you generally feel about the leadership of your department?

12. How do you generally feel about the leadership of your school?

---

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much

That is the end of the interview.

## Appendix E: Principals' Modified Interview Guide

### ► Head of School

#### Roles and role relationships

1. As the head of school, how do you define the role of the department heads in this school?
2. What is your understanding of their role?
  - [Why?]
3. How is your relationship with them?
  - [Why?]

#### Leadership involvement

4. Do you involve the department heads in the overall leadership of your school?
  - [What responsibilities?]
  - [Autonomy?]

<b><i>Consultation</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>	<b><i>Implementation</i></b>
<i>Whole-school policies</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Authority</i>
<i>Development plans</i>	<i>Process</i>	
<i>Timetabling</i>	<i>Final decision</i>	
<i>Resource allocation</i>		
<i>School vision development</i>		
<i>Curriculum</i>		
➤ <i>Consultation process</i>		

5. Do you involve the subject teachers in the overall leadership of your school?
  - [What responsibilities?]
  - [Autonomy?]

## Instructional engagement

6. To what extent are you involved in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in the departments of your school?

➤ [How?]

---

### ***Instructional mechanisms***

---

<i>Lesson observation</i>	<i>Feedback</i>	<i>Modelling</i>
<i>Professional development</i>	<i>Training</i>	<i>Coaching &amp; mentoring</i>

➤ [Barriers?]

## Opinions & feelings

7. How knowledgeable are the department heads in the subjects they lead?

8. How much autonomy do the department heads have in leading their departments?

9. How do you generally feel about the leadership of the selected departments?

10. How do you generally feel about the leadership of your school?

---

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much

That is the end of the interview.

## Appendix F: Subject Teachers' Modified Interview Guide

### ▶ Subject Teachers

#### Roles and role relationships

1. As a subject teacher, how do you define the role of your department head?
2. What is your understanding of her/his role?
  - [Why?]
3. How is your relationship with her/him?
  - [Why?]

#### Leadership involvement

5. Does your department head involve you in the overall leadership of the department?
  - [What responsibilities?]
  - [Autonomy?]

<b><i>Consultation</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>	<b><i>Implementation</i></b>
<i>Departmental policies</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Authority</i>
<i>Development plans</i>	<i>Process</i>	
<i>Timetabling</i>	<i>Final decision</i>	
<i>Resource allocation</i>		
<i>Department vision</i>		
<i>development</i>		
<i>Scheme of work</i>		
➤ <i>Consultation process</i>		

5. Does the management team involve you in the overall leadership of your school?
  - [What responsibilities?]
  - [Autonomy?]

## Instructional engagement

6. Have your lessons been ever observed?

- *[How often?]*
- *[Process]*

---

### ***Instructional mechanisms***

---

<i>Lesson observation</i>	<i>Feedback</i>	<i>Modelling</i>
<i>Professional development</i>	<i>Training</i>	<i>Coaching &amp; mentoring</i>

- *[Barriers?]*

## Opinions & feelings

7. How knowledgeable is your department head in the subject s/he leads?

8. How much autonomy does your department head have in leading the department?

9. How do you generally feel about the leadership of your department?

10. How do you generally feel about the leadership of your school?

---

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much

That is the end of the interview.

**Appendix G: Observation Schedule (Departmental Meetings)**

► Observation Schedule

Departmental Meeting

Timing	Agenda and Focus of Discussion	Speaker	Action by
1 <sup>st</sup> 15 min			
2 <sup>nd</sup> 15 min			
3 <sup>rd</sup> 15 min			
4 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
5 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
6 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
7 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
8 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			

Notes



## Appendix H: Observation Schedule (Staff Meetings)

### ► Observation Schedule Staff Meeting

Timing	Agenda and Focus of Discussion	Speaker	Action by
1 <sup>st</sup> 15 min			
2 <sup>nd</sup> 15 min			
3 <sup>rd</sup> 15 min			
4 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
5 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
6 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
7 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			
8 <sup>th</sup> 15 min			

---

Notes