University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

'Critical Friends?': An examination of the relationship between headteachers and Chairs of Governors in English secondary schools.

Philip Rowe

20403985

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2025

Supervisors: Professor Toby Greany

Asst Professor Kevin Richardson

School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Nottingham

Word Count: 95,294

No material in this thesis has been used in any other submission for another academic award.

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Philip Rowe to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by Philip Rowe in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS 3
ABSTRACT 7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 9
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS 10
LIST OF FIGURES 11
LIST OF TABLES 12
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 13
1.1 The purpose of the study. 13
1.2 My personal rationale for studying the headteacher-CoG relationship. 14
1.3 The focus of the research. 17
1.4 Overview of the thesis. 24
1.5 Ambitions for the research and its findings. 26
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 27
2.1 Overview. 27
2.2 The value of workplace relationships. 28
2.3 The changing nature and purpose of governance. 32
2.4 The characteristics of governors. 37
2.5 The task of governing. 38
2.6 The role of the CoG. 39
2.7 The headteacher's relationship with governance and governors. 41
2.8 The CoG's role as a 'critical friend' to the headteacher. 45
2.9 Key issues within the headteacher-CoG relationship. 48
2.9.1 The appointment and induction of the headteacher. 49
2.9.2 Communication. 52
2.9.3 Support and challenge. 53
2.9.4 Strategic and operational. 55
2.9.5 Appraisal. 56
2.10 The CEO-Chair relationship in non-school settings. 57
2.11 Conclusion to Chapter 2. 59
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 60
3.1 Introduction. 60
3.2 Evolving theoretical perspectives. 60
3.3 Relational leadership. 63
3.4 Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX). 67

3.4.1 The domains of leadership. 69
3.4.2 The evolution of Leader-Member Exchange Theory. 70
3.4.3 Graen and Uhl Bien's life cycle of leadership making. 73
3.5 Phenomenology 76
3.5.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. 78
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY 81
4.1 Research design. 81
4.2 Research questions. 83
4.3 Selection of participants. 85
4.4 Interviews 92
4.5 Data analysis. 97
4.6 Ethical and safety considerations. 102
4.7 Validity and 'generalizability'. 104
CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION 108
5.1 Responses to Research Question 1 108
5.2 Responses to Research Question 2 113
5.3 Responses to Research Question 3 121
5.3.1 Contact, meetings and communication. 121
5.3.2 Trust 129
5.3.3 Personal and professional boundaries. 133
5.3.4 Change and development. 141
5.4 Responses to Research Question 4 147
5.5 Responses to Research Question 5 154
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION 161
6.1 Overview 161
6.2 Self-concept and power dynamics within the headteacher-CoG relationship. 163
6.2.1 Self-concept. 163
6.2.2 Applying Foucault's conceptualisation of power to the headteacher-CoG relationship. 172
6.2.3 Summary of Section 6.2. 179
6.3 How and why communication patterns and processes within headteacher-CoG relationships can be 'interactionally rich'. 180
6.3.1 The determinants of 'interactional richness'. 181
6.3.2 Antecedents of relational development. 183
6.3.3 Relational content of messages. 184
6.3.4 Temporal message patterns. 193

6.3.5 Relational perceptions. 198
6.3.6 Expressive and instrumental attributions. 200
6.3.7 The role of macrolevel influences. 203
6.3.8 Summary of Section 6.3. 205
6.4 The factors involved in the development of trust, as portrayed in Mayer et al's model of trust, and whether friendship is possible or even desirable in workplace relationships. 207
6.4.1 The role of friendship in workplace relationships. 213
6.4.2 Summary of Section 6.4. 216
6.5 The headteacher-CoG relationship as viewed through the life cycle of leadership making. 217
6.5.1 The 'stranger' phase. 218
6.5.2 The 'acquaintance' phase. 226
6.5.3 The 'maturity' phase. 232
6.5.4 Summary of Section 6.5. 236
7.1 Principal findings and the thesis' contribution to knowledge about the headteacher-CoG relationship. 238
7.1.1 Early dynamics between headteachers and CoGs are shaped more through incidental learning and personal experiences than formal guidance and training. 239
7.1.2 Proactive appointment and induction processes can play a crucial role in setting the relationship's tone through personalised interactions that build rapport and mutual understanding. 240
7.1.3 Consistent and meaningful communication, with trust as its cornerstone, is essential for building and sustaining the relationship. 242
7.1.4 'Critical friend', although controversial, remains a recognised concept, describing a relationship where professional demands are tempered by personal warmth and empathy. 245
7.1.5 Suggestions of confusion over the boundary between operational and strategic responsibility can be overplayed. 246
7.1.6 Researching relationships from both independent and state-funded sectors revealed how close and impactful relationships exist in both but that the developing structural complexity in schools within MATs is making it less likely for such relationships to flourish. 247
7.1.7 Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolving relationship between headteachers and CoGs. 248
7.2 Reflections on the methodological approach taken and on my positionality as a researcher. 249
7.3 How the results of the research have been disseminated to date and how I intend to present these in future. 251
7.4 Practical recommendations for how the findings from this study can be used to improve the headteacher-CoG relationship. 252

7.4.1 Induction and training should be provided for both headteachers and CoGs as to how to conduct their relationship. 253
7.4.2 Appointment processes, for both headteachers and CoGs, should become more relationally oriented. 253
7.4.3 Protocols regarding communication should be established early in the relationship, in order to build trust from the outset, with 'contracting' as a potential mechanism for achieving this. 254
7.4.4 The term 'Critical Friend' should be refined and developed. 255
7.4.5 Structured mentoring schemes and peer support networks should be established for both headteachers and CoGs. 255
7.4.6 As part of headteacher appraisal and governance review, there should be a specific focus on the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG. 256
7.4.7 LMX has the potential to be used as a diagnostic and developmental tool in leadership relationships. 257
7.5 Suggestions for how this and other school leadership relationships could be researched in future. 258
7.5.1 A longitudinal research design could potentially provide a more authoritative account of how the headteacher-CoG relationship develops over time. 258
7.5.2 Research could be undertaken using a larger sample size and a mixed-methods approach, in order to deepen and enhance our understanding of the headteacher-CoG relationship in a wider variety of contexts. 259
7.5.3 Further research into the headteacher-CoG relationship could be used to develop LMX as a conceptual lens in the study of high-level executive relationships, where leader and follower roles are less clearly defined and often shared. 261
7.6 Concluding comments regarding the thesis. 263
BIBLIOGRAPHY 265
LIST OF APPENDICES 282
APPENDIX A: Final ethics approval from UoNSoE. 283
APPENDIX B: Text of a speculative email sent to headteachers, requesting their participation in the research. 284
APPENDIX C: Information sheet for potential research participants. 286
APPENDIX D: Consent form. 288
APPENDIX E: Interview schedule for headteachers. 290
APPENDIX F: Interview schedule for CoGs. 293
APPENDIX G: Data overview of Relationship E. 296
APPENDIX H: Coding schedule. 303

ABSTRACT

Few relationships in English school leadership are as important as that between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors [CoG]. This can be a fruitful, high-functioning co-created partnership; alternatively, it has the potential to be fractious and inharmonious, negatively affecting not just the school but also the individuals involved. Literature on the subject is limited and focused more on the rationale for the relationship than its practice.

The thesis focuses on eight headteacher-CoG relationships in English secondary schools, in both the state-funded and independent sectors, to examine how they are forged and developed, so as to identify indicators of successful ways of working. A relational leadership perspective is adopted, specifically developing Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) to focus on a relationship where both parties possess leader and follower identities. The research's methodology is based on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), due to a desire to investigate the participants' lived experience of the relationship alongside that of the researcher.

What emerges is a portrait of a relationship that is as much about the personalities involved as it is about the institutional roles they occupy. The headteacher-CoG dynamic is portrayed as a living, evolving partnership: a relationship that is shaped by individual character, previous experiences and the organic process of learning through interaction. Whilst the term 'critical friend' still maintains some validity, it does not completely reflect the high level of support that both parties can give to each other nor the capacity for considerable professional and personal intervention. It concludes that the most effective relationships are those in which both parties are willing to invest time, energy and emotional openness into building a foundation of mutual respect and shared purpose. This, in turn, has a ripple effect on the wider governance of the school, enhancing not only the efficiency of day-to-day decision-making but also the strategic capacity of the governing body as a whole.

The paper additionally hopes that LMX, and relational leadership in general, can be utilised more extensively in order to highlight the role that positive and healthy relationships can play in improving school leadership and the lives of school leaders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My most sincere thanks must go to all the people who participated in this study, without whom this research would not have been possible. Given the sensitive nature of the headteacher-CoG relationship, many had to be prepared to take a leap of faith in divulging their thoughts and opinions to me and I will remain forever grateful for their commitment, candour and generosity in doing so. I would also like to thank those individuals who helped arrange the interviews so that they could be carried out efficiently, especially given the time demands of those involved.

I am indebted to the excellent supervision of Professor Toby Greany and Assistant Professor Kevin Richardson, who, through their advice, guidance and words of wisdom, helped shaped my initial thoughts into the final study. Their insight, encouragement and unfailing sense of humour meant that our supervisions were always enjoyable as well as educative.

I am grateful to the many researchers and scholars at the University of Nottingham School of Education and elsewhere, who have generously shared their own research and views with me and provided advice and ideas for this study.

I would also like to add my appreciation for the experiences I have had as a teacher and school leader over the past thirty years. This thesis is in part a product of my own lived experience within a variety of contexts and I would like to think that this has somehow been converted into a form of wisdom that can impact positively the professional lives of others, just as the wisdom of others has changed and inspired me.

Finally, thank you to my wonderful wife and children, who, as well as giving me such unfailing support and encouragement over the past four years, have always believed in me. This thesis is dedicated to them.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Term/Explanation
AGBIS	Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools
AoC	Association of Colleges
BELMAS	British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoG	Chair of Governors
DfE	Department for Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HMC	The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LA	Local Authority
LGB	Local Governing Body
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange Theory
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
NCTL	National College of Teaching & Leadership
NGA	National Governance Association
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headteachers
Ofsted/OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
RQ	Research Question
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
UoNSoE	University of Nottingham School of Education

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Description	Page
3.1	The dynamics at work within the complex relationship between headteacher and CoG.	61
3.2	The domains of leadership (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 221).	69
3.3	Life cycle of leadership making (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 231).	74
4.1	The analytic hierarchy (Spencer et al, 2003: 212).	99
6.1	Factors influencing power within leadership relations (Ladkin and Probert, 2019: 9).	175
6.2	The determinants of interactional richness (Barry and Crant, 2000: 650).	182
6.3	Mayer et al's proposed model of trust (Mayer et al, 1995: 715).	208
6.4	The 'stranger' phase.	218
6.5	The 'acquaintance' phase.	226
6.6	The 'maturity' phase.	232
6.7	Definitions of the leader behaviours (Yukl et al, 2008: 292).	233

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
4.1	Key characteristics of schools at which Relationships A to H are based.	87
4.2	Summary of participant characteristics within Relationships A to H.	88
4.3	Pen portraits of participants within Relationships A to H.	90
4.4	Analysis coding for Research Question 2.	101
5.1	Summary of meeting arrangements and contact outside of meetings.	121
5.2	Brief summary of headteachers' views of the phrase 'critical friend'.	147
5.3	Brief summary of CoGs' views of the phrase 'critical friend'.	148
6.1	Levels of representation of the Self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996: 84).	165

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of the study.

In England, governance in schools refers to the system of oversight and accountability provided by a governing body, which is responsible for ensuring that the school delivers high standards of education, remains financially viable and meets its statutory obligations (DfE, 2020a). Governing bodies are composed of volunteers, drawn from a range of backgrounds, including alumni, parents, staff and members of the local community. Their core functions include setting the school's strategic vision, holding the headteacher to account for educational performance and overseeing its finances. They are overseen by a Chair of Governors [elided to CoG throughout this thesis], who is expected to offer continuity and perspective on matters of school leadership and governance, not least through maintaining a regular dialogue with the headteacher, although how this is carried out is not clearly defined in either statutory guidance or wider academic literature. Whilst the relationship is commonly regarded as important for the effective functioning of school leadership, the expectations surrounding it often remain vague, shaped more by accustomed practice and individual disposition than by any consistent framework or model. This study aims to rectify this and initiate a process whereby the nature and importance of the relationship can be more widely researched and recognised.

There were four principal aims to my undertaking this research. The first was to satisfy my genuine curiosity about the headteacher-CoG relationship, given my prior professional experience (as detailed in Section 1.2) and what I perceived to be a considerable gap in research about secondary school leadership. The second was to uncover practical information about how the relationship operates, such as how it emerges and develops, the pattern of communication within it and how the participants regard the relationship on a personal and professional level. Given that so little is known about these, as explained in Chapter 2, I believed this was important to research and write about in an academic study. The third was to

understand the approach of both parties to the relationship, how and why they are motivated to engage with each other and what significance they give to the relationship within their stewardship of the school. The study therefore takes a phenomenological approach towards the research participants, to get to the heart of their lived experience, revealing not just how individuals operate within this context but potentially to understand the issues at the heart of leadership relationships within similar professional organisations. The fourth arose more from an organisational perspective in order to understand how the relationship can play a strategic role within the wider context of the school, although the research was not designed to determine the 'effectiveness' of each relationship as such. However, it was my belief prior to beginning the research that high-functioning relationships can play a crucial part in engendering successful strategic and cultural change within organisations and I hoped the research would reveal examples of practice which demonstrated this.

1.2 My personal rationale for studying the headteacher-CoG relationship.

In addition to the above, my decision to focus on the headteacher-CoG relationship was partly born out of personal experience as a headteacher at an English independent school. In that role, I worked alongside two CoGs (one after the other) and so possess direct, first-hand experience of the relationship. However, it has not been my intention to make this an autoethnographic study and so have refrained from involving too much of my own experience within the research. At times, this has not always proved possible (or even desirable) and I have addressed both the strengths and drawbacks of my positionality within Chapters 3, 4 and 7. That said, it would be remiss within these introductory comments not to record how my first-hand experience has impacted on my knowledge and understanding of the relationship. To that end, using the benefit of hindsight, below are the principal reflections on what I experienced from 'inside' the headteacher-CoG relationship:

- Coming into headship, I had only scant knowledge of the role of governors, even though I had prior experience of being a parent governor in a state-funded primary school. My understanding as to how a headteacher could and should relate to the CoG was particularly limited, as I had only observed this relationship at a distance when I was a deputy. No training or guidance was available at the time of or after my appointment to explain how this relationship could or should work.
- I only met the CoG on a couple of occasions prior to starting in post and then discussion largely focused on social niceties. There was no opportunity given, within the appointment process, or soon after, for the CoG to get to know me personally or vice-versa. On my sole visit to the school prior to starting, I felt I had to tease out of her issues regarding my predecessor's departure and the school's financial position. On both our parts, there was a sense that it was easier to adopt a 'don't mention the war' position, as this avoided potential awkwardness in our initial exchanges.
- There was no attempt by either party to contract the headteacher-CoG relationship. Meetings and communication took place on an informal and sporadic basis and for no specific purpose other than 'catching up'. Given that she had been CoG for ten years by that stage, I presumed this was the pattern that had been established under my predecessor and saw no reason for this not to continue.
- We never discussed the agenda for governors' meetings nor desired outcomes. Strategic planning was instigated by me and the senior leadership team, the bursar in particular, and then presented for scrutiny at governors' meetings. I did not therefore see either CoG as a strategic partner as such, in part because this was never indicated to me that this was of interest to them personally.
- As I saw it, both CoGs saw their role primarily as chair of trustees (the school being a charitable foundation), chairing governors' meetings and representing the views of governors. Neither saw themselves as having a unique relationship with the headteacher nor any specific desire to develop this beyond the courteous and professional.

- On occasion, the division between strategic and operational responsibility was referred to. How this was defined was accepted as a given and was never properly discussed or explored. In a school experiencing financial difficulties, most operational matters have strategic consequences and so this lack of clarity inevitably added to a sense of unease as the school had to undergo significant change.
- I found the bursar, who had been a successful businessman in his prior career, to be an excellent colleague to have when embarking on headship for the first time. He was astute and supportive and I respected his judgement. However, it underlined the importance of understanding roles within an organisation. I should not have confused his charisma for status, appreciating now that, even though both CoGs were less visible and active, their roles still gave them ultimate authority.
- There was no appraisal process or annual review. I was appraised during my third year in post but only at my behest and the appraiser was appointed at my suggestion. The appraisal was mostly positive but recognised my relative isolation from the CoG and the governing body, something the report warned against. The report was overlooked, with the (second) CoG concluding that 'we're all right, aren't we?'. It again illustrated the importance of formal oversight and review.

Whilst my time at the school did not end well, I do not ultimately blame either CoG for that outcome. On reflection, though, I can appreciate the cost to both of us, and the school, for not understanding the importance of forging and developing a close working relationship. This was not due to negligence but a result of a lack of knowledge, training and, to some extent, insight. At the time, I was genuinely puzzled as to the purpose of my interactions with the CoG, as (or so it seemed) were they. This thesis is therefore partly motivated by a desire to make sense of that confusion and find ways to improve the relationship for both 'sides' in the future.

These experiences naturally aided the early planning stages of the research and, combined with broader lines of inquiry derived from reading and casual interactions with colleagues, served to inform its rationale and methodological approach. They also guided me throughout the process when I was considering the significance of some of the data and when questions were raised about my positionality; hence why the adoption of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was such an important step forward, as this lived experience could now be seen as an advantage for the research, and me as a researcher, rather than as a disadvantage to be 'bracketed' away. Van Manen's argument that 'lived experience is the starting point and the end point of phenomenological research … It is the breathing of meaning, the grounding of all reflective human understanding' (van Manen, 2016: 36) provided the necessary reassurance that, within reason, my own experiences could be utilised alongside those of the data sample, enriching the research and its outcomes in the process.

1.3 The focus of the research.

This research focuses on eight headteacher-CoG relationships in English secondary schools across both the state-funded and independent sectors. The reason for confining the sample to secondary schools is that, principally due to the size of the school and the governing body, the role of CoG is different to that in primary schools. A novel aspect of the research is that the sample is split between schools in the independent and state-funded sectors. The inclusion of independent schools in the study is due in part to my professional background in the sector and therefore the insights I could give could potentially enrich it. Contrasting it with equivalent relationships in the state-funded sector would allow for some interesting comparison between different governance structures and institutional cultures. Although governance in the independent sector is regulated primarily by the Charity Commission rather than the DfE, there is sufficient alignment with the state-funded sector to make comparisons meaningful, certainly when examining how each individual relationship is conducted. Both sectors are required to meet

key DfE regulations in areas such as safeguarding and both rely on a similar model of lay governance and strategic oversight.

However, there can also be important differences, such as in the role and composition of boards and the mechanisms of accountability. For example, the development of MATs has significantly altered the role of governing bodies in state-funded schools. Prior to MATs, LGBs held direct responsibility for strategic oversight, finance and the performance of the headteacher, enabling a clear and direct relationship between the CoG and the headteacher. When schools join MATs, these functions are largely absorbed by the trust board, leaving LGBs with a more limited, often advisory remit focused on community engagement and monitoring rather than decision-making (Ryan-Atkin, 2023). Baxter and Cornforth (2021) found that accountability now runs through several layers: headteachers report both to a central executive team and to trustees, whilst CoGs act mainly as intermediaries who relay information upwards and interpret trust policy locally. This redistribution of authority creates overlapping lines of accountability and can blur expectations as to whom holds the headteacher to account, complicating what was once a relatively direct partnership between headteacher and CoG. Through comparison of schools in different sectors, some of the effects of such structural differences on the headteacher-CoG can be investigated.

Whilst the term 'critical friend' is no longer prevalent in contemporary literature regarding the headteacher-CoG relationship, it was intentionally included within the thesis title. This is because it continues to serve as a convenient shorthand for how the relationship is commonly understood, given that it encompasses the principal concerns of support and challenge, collaboration and accountability. However, the phrase itself is seldom examined in depth and its inherent tensions remain underexplored. This research therefore seeks in part to investigate the validity of the term, especially considering how the headteacher-CoG relationship is enacted in practice. It explores how these relationships are initiated and developed and how they operate in 'real world' settings, with attention to the dynamic, and sometimes conflicting, roles that define them.

In planning the research, there were four areas of interest I was keen to address, which, in turn, informed the development of my research questions. The first regards the challenges that exist for both headteachers and CoGs of leading in unfamiliar territory. Most headteachers will feel confident in managing internal change and dealing with issues affecting staff, pupils and parents, even at the start of their tenure, no doubt having worked collaboratively with other school leaders in the past. However, operating at a strategic level with someone from outside the profession, can feel more abstract and less within their immediate control. Working closely and strategically with the headteacher may be a novel experience for some new CoGs, especially if their professional experience lies outside education. Whilst they likely have experience of governance, their engagement with the headteacher may only have been tangential and not of the same intensity as that when CoG. In such situations, leadership can become more uncertain, with little direct knowledge and experience to fall back on. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) draw a distinction between leading in familiar circumstances and navigating unknown challenges. In such instances, 'adaptive' leadership is required, where, instead of deploying recognised solutions, leaders must find out what the issue or the problem is in the first place. For both headteachers and CoGs, that requires considerable insight and inner confidence, as they endeavour to find a way through, even whilst potentially feeling out of their depth. This study looks at how different individuals steer a path through the more novel aspects of their leadership responsibilities so that they can act confidently where precedent does not exist.

The second area for investigation is to understand how headteachers and CoGs work together in order to arrive at an agreed agenda, given that strategic planning in schools is rarely a straightforward task. It is shaped not only by formal role expectations but also by wider questions of authority, professional identity and institutional culture. The headteacher, as the leading professional in the school, brings an intimate knowledge of its day-to-day functioning, including the practical needs of staff, pupils and parents. In contrast, CoGs, who can come from sectors as diverse as business, law or the charity sector, may bring strategic

insight and external experience but can be more removed from the daily pressures of school life (James et al, 2010). This mix of internal and external viewpoints can enhance governance but it can also create uncertainty around fundamental questions as to whose strategic priorities should take precedence.

The process of deciding what matters strategically can sometimes be contested. Differing professional and personal values, past experiences and assumptions about the purpose of schooling all shape how headteachers and CoGs view the role of strategy. In some cases, long-standing cultural norms within the school or governing body can reinforce particular ways of thinking, making it difficult to challenge the status quo or introduce new initiatives. Ball (2012) highlights how policy enactment in schools is always mediated by the micro-politics of the institution, where leadership is exercised not in abstract but through negotiation and adaptation. Strategic alignment, in this sense, is not only about agreeing on goals but about navigating power relations and competing expectations.
Greany and Higham (2018) stress the importance of a shared sense of purpose and mutual understanding in school governance but this is easier to advocate than to achieve. Headteachers, immersed in the realities of operational leadership, may prioritise actions that deliver immediate impact. Such initiatives may appear small but may potentially have a big impact within the school. However, unless such changes lead to a sustained strategic impact, governors may overlook or negate their significance. Meanwhile, governors, including CoGs, may be more focused on longer-term positioning and institutional robustness, particularly regarding finance. This divergence can produce tension, particularly where strategic objectives appear disconnected from what is happening 'on the ground'. As Simkins (2012) notes, strategy in schools is rarely linear or technical: it involves flexible interpretation and continual revision in response to changing conditions.

In this light, the challenge of developing strategy is not simply about creating a plan but about managing the dynamic interplay between different viewpoints and timeframes. The space in which headteachers and CoGs work together to shape the school's future is one that often lacks clear rules and is determined as much

by interpersonal understanding as by policy or procedure. The development of a coherent strategic direction, therefore, depends not only on formal structures but also on the capacity of these two roles to negotiate meaning, reconcile competing agendas and build enough common ground to move forward together, often referred to colloquially as the headteacher and the CoG 'walking in lockstep'.

The third domain I sought to address is the way in which leadership is practised through the relationship. Unlike models of leadership rooted in hierarchy or unilateral authority, the headteacher-CoG partnership represents a form of leadership that is, by necessity, relational. The headteacher does not simply act alone, nor does the CoG exercise top-down control. Instead, their capacity to lead is shaped through ongoing engagement with one another, through conversation, shared judgement and mutual recognition of roles and boundaries. Yet, despite the increasing emphasis on collaboration in educational leadership literature, there remains limited practical advice or guidance on what it actually means to lead through a relationship. There is little clarity around how such relationships are meant to be constructed or sustained and few frameworks that specify what kinds of conversations are appropriate or necessary, how priorities are set jointly or what kinds of outcomes should reasonably emerge from such a partnership. As a result, much is left to individual interpretation. The potential for productive partnership is often reliant on the personalities involved and their ability to read the informal signals that guide relational work. Leadership here is not about command or compliance but about the ability to negotiate and align, often in subtle and unspoken ways.

This relational mode of leadership carries implications for both individuals. For the headteacher, it can mean navigating the demands of school leadership, whilst also attending to the expectations and perspectives of the CoG. For the CoG, it involves stepping into a role that influences but does not manage, that guides but does not control. Both are required to lead, yet neither can do so in isolation. As Gronn (2002) and Spillane et al (2004) have argued, leadership in schools is increasingly distributed but what is less often addressed is the interpersonal labour involved in

sustaining such distribution, given the emotional and cognitive effort required to establish trust and resilience, especially when not all exchanges will be supportive. These are not incidental aspects of leadership: they are central to how it functions in practice.

Given the headteacher-CoG relationship will be at its most intense and impactful at times of heightened institutional stress, the fourth issue of interest is the emotional intensity that accompanies leadership when it is most under pressure. In such moments, whether they be crises in safeguarding, staffing disputes, parental complaints or a falling school roll, the usual boundaries between professional detachment and personal investment can become blurred, with any decisions carrying long-term consequences. The emotional demands placed on both leaders can therefore be considerable. Emotions in this context are not an incidental aspect of leadership but a central force shaping how issues are approached, how leaders respond and how relationships are either reinforced or strained. At the point where the headteacher and CoG are expected to lead together, the quality of their emotional resilience and their ability to sustain themselves and each other becomes crucial. The partnership is expected to support decision-making under pressure but it can just as easily become a site of emotional strain itself.

Crawford (2009) suggests that the emotional labour (as termed by Hochschild, 1983) required in educational leadership can be intense and yet is often overlooked or underestimated. Emotions in leadership are rarely simple and she suggests three 'textures' which each reveal the complex interaction between emotions and educational decision-making. The first shows the necessity of emotional regulation when 'performing' the role of headteacher (on which she was focusing, although this could also be applied, to some degree, to CoGs). The gamut of emotions a headteacher can be expected to exhibit – from firm, calm and controlled to warm, caring and empathetic – can exact a high price if there is a 'disconnection between shown emotion and private feeling' (Crawford, 2009: 25). The tragic suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry, following an unfavourable

Ofsted inspection (Adams, 2023), revealed the considerable emotional toll when headteachers feel compelled to internalise emotions incompatible with their public-facing demeanour. The second highlighted the emotional consequences of decision-making, with school settings being unusual due to the emotional closeness and interdependency of the school community. She cites the work of Ginsberg and Davies (2003) who argued that educational leaders are largely unprepared for the emotional fall-out (felt by them and others) of their decision-making. The third states how headteachers both shape and reflect the emotional context of their school. Any relationship within that organisation, that between the headteacher and CoG being no different, will be governed to some extent by the emotional climate created and conducted by the headteacher, other senior leaders and the governing body.

Kelchtermans (2005) has also shown how emotional understanding and self-awareness are essential to professional agency in school leadership, yet this is seldom acknowledged in policy or practice. This research also, on occasion, reflects on how discussing, or being concerned about, emotions at work between those with executive authority is somehow seen as inappropriate or 'un-English'. A specific intention of the research, therefore, was to investigate how the emotions and feelings of both headteachers and CoGs are managed in practice and how far they contribute (or detract) from the strength, purpose and impact of the relationship.

With the above in mind, I arrived at five research questions. The formulation of these will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Research Question 1	To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-CoG relationship?
Research Question 2	How far is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment and induction process?
Research Question 3	Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?

Research Question 4	How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs in the context of CoGs supporting and challenging the headteacher?
Research Question 5	How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?

1.4 Overview of the thesis.

Having established the principal aims and rationale for the study in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 reviews the literature that frames the study. It discusses how governance has evolved over time in both sectors and how recent policy initiatives, such as academisation, have impacted on established patterns and conventions of governance. It explores broader theories of workplace relationships and their relevance to school settings, with particular attention given to concepts like trust, collaboration and 'critical friend'. It also considers comparative research on CEO-Chair relationships outside education, drawing parallels that help to contextualise the headteacher-CoG dynamic.

Chapter 3 explains the conceptual framework and outlines how it supports the enquiry. The study adopts a relational perspective, focusing on Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) in particular. The chapter also establishes the rationale for using an interpretive phenomenological approach due to the opportunity it provides to focus on the lived experiences of the research participants. The discussion includes an analysis of my own positionality, the interpretive stance taken during data analysis and the ethical considerations that shaped the research process.

Chapter 4 addresses the methodology of the study, including the process of selecting participants and how the data was gathered and analysed. It also reflects on questions of validity, generalizability and the limitations associated with researching professional relationships that are private, idiosyncratic and emotionally complex.

Chapter 5 presents the findings, organised according to the five original research questions. The chapter relays the range of experiences reported by participants, focusing on topics such as the quality and frequency of communication, the formation of trust, how personal and professional boundaries are negotiated and the ways the relationship adapts over time. The data shows how certain patterns emerge consistently across cases, such as the importance of early informal interactions and the tendency for mutual expectations to be shaped less by formal role descriptions than by ongoing exchanges and implicit understandings.

Chapter 6 offers a sustained discussion of the findings and integrates them with some of the theoretical ideas introduced earlier. It begins by exploring how self-concept and perceived power influence how both headteachers and CoGs approach their roles. Drawing on Foucault's work, it examines how power is exercised and negotiated in the absence of a fixed hierarchy, with influence flowing in both directions depending on the situation. The chapter then turns to the subject of communication, showing how interactional richness is achieved not simply through frequency of contact but through the nature and quality of conversations. Key factors identified include timing, emotional tone and shared understanding of strategic priorities. Trust is examined in depth, with the chapter describing it not as a static quality but as a continually negotiated condition, vulnerable to shifts in context, behaviour and external pressures. The chapter also applies the LMX life cycle of leadership making model, developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), to illustrate how these relationships typically pass through distinct phases, principally how they evolve from formal and distant arrangements into more open and collaborative exchanges. Through this lens, the chapter shows how relational leadership is built not through directives or procedures but through accumulated moments of shared purpose and mutual recognition.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis and is discussed below.

1.5 Ambitions for the research and its findings.

The findings suggest that these partnerships are shaped less by formal procedures and more by emotional investment, personal commitment and ongoing interaction. This evaluation invites a reconsideration of conventional governance frameworks, which often emphasise structure over relationships. Insights from this work may also be relevant to leadership contexts beyond education, particularly where collaboration depends on shared direction and mutual confidence.

A future step could involve a longitudinal approach that follows the development of headteacher-CoG relationships across time. Tracking how early interactions affect the stability and quality of long-term collaboration may help identify key turning points that influence governance outcomes. Studying a more varied group of schools, each with its own context and leadership approach, would bring greater depth to the analysis and allow for broader application of the findings. Combining qualitative interviews with survey-based data could further strengthen the research by grounding interpretations in a wider pool of experience.

These findings also have practical implications for leadership preparation and training. By designing professional development programmes that reflect the importance of relationship-building, researchers and practitioners could offer tools that help new leaders form more effective partnerships from the beginning. Partnerships with governance organisations may support the creation of training materials that are both research-informed and practically relevant. Exploring these dynamics across different national contexts could reveal common features of strong leadership relationships, despite differences in policy or system structure. At its core, this research seeks to give greater visibility to the human connections that shape how leadership is practised and how organisations succeed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview.

This literature review does not adopt a strictly systematic approach but instead draws upon the principles of integrative review, as described by Toracco (2005), whilst acknowledging the methodological flexibility required by the topic. Toracco defined the integrative literature review as 'a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated' (Toracco, 2005: 356). Given the limited and scattered literature regarding this subject, a conventional systematic review, with its emphasis on rigid inclusion criteria, would have excluded a range of illuminating but less obviously relevant sources. A largely integrative approach was therefore adopted, in which an initial focus on research directly concerned with the headteacher-CoG relationship, and governance more generally, was gradually expanded to include broader discussions about relationships in educational and non-educational settings. This allowed the more specific material researched initially to inform a broader exploration of how relationships are formed and experienced within leadership contexts, an approach that emerged naturally as connections between different areas of research became clearer. Consistent with Toracco's approach, this review therefore seeks to generate a more holistic understanding of the relationship, and the conditions which shape it, so as to inform the design of the study's methodology and provide additional context to its conclusions.

Section 2.2 highlights the value and importance of relationships for wellbeing, focusing especially on relationships in the workplace. The ASPIRE framework (Roffey, 2016) of attributes exhibited in effective relationships is discussed, as this serves to underscore much of the later analysis regarding headteacher-CoG relationships. Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 describe the current status of governance, governors and governing in English schools. Section 2.3 looks at the history of governance in English schools in both the state-funded and independent sectors.

It explains how the role and purpose of governance in state-funded schools has undergone considerable change since the 1980s, with the move to academisation in particular reshaping the remit and powers of governing bodies. The creation of multi-academy trusts (MATs), however, have meant that LGBs have much less authority than previously, giving added complexity to the CoG's relationship with the headteacher. Section 2.4 presents the latest data on the governor population and some of the steps currently underway to broaden the diversity of those who become governors. Section 2.5 analyses in brief what is required of individuals to fulfil their role as governors. Section 2.6 examines how the role of the CoG has seen increased attention from literature and guidance since the early 2000s and Section 2.7 outlines suggestions for how the headteacher should relate to governors. Section 2.8 explores the history of the phrase 'critical friend' and how it has been seen to encapsulate the essence of how headteachers and CoGs should relate to each other. Section 2.9 presents a summary of some of the key issues affecting the relationship and how writers have addressed these both theoretically and practically, with some commentary about how some of these may manifest themselves in reality. Section 2.10 examines some equivalent relationships in other countries to assess how far comparable issues exist in systems which share some similarities in governance. Section 2.11 concludes the chapter, reflecting on how other CEO-Chair relationships can help illuminate the headteacher-CoG equivalent and vice-versa.

2.2 The value of workplace relationships.

This is a study of leadership as enacted through a relationship. Healthy, positive relationships are important: Seligman (2011) identifies them as one of the five pillars of authentic wellbeing. Reis and Gable (2003) consider that relationships may be the most important source of life satisfaction and wellbeing. Organisation theorists and practitioners have recognised that organisations are social systems in which the relationships between people play a vital role (Clarkson & Shaw, 1992). Roffey (2016) argues that this is even more so the case today: given the

changing nature of family structures and the fact that many now live and work some distance from the family home, the primary relationships in many peoples' lives may be at work rather than at home.

The quality of these relationships is therefore of the utmost importance, not just for the individuals concerned but also for the wider organisation, a few reasons being:

- **Improved Wellbeing**: positive relationships improve psychological wellbeing and impact positively on physical health. Dutton et al (2014) describe how work-related identities are formed in the workplace and that, when they become more positive, there is enhanced psychological and social functioning. Positive emotions and a consequent reduction in stress impact on our hormonal, cardiovascular and immune systems (Lewis, 2011).
- **Promotion of Collaboration and Teamwork**: Although putting teams together does not necessarily indicate positive work relationships, evidence from Richardson and West (2010) shows that these are more likely when a sense of belonging is developed through frequent interactions, shared reward and an appreciation of each person's efforts.
- **Reduction of Conflict**: Poor quality connections can leave people feeling 'diminished, frustrated, demotivated, demoralised, disrespected or worse – this can lead to being revengeful, despairing or annihilated' (Lewis, 2011: 180). Although conflict is normal in any relationship, it is how areas of conflict are addressed and resolved which matters.
- **Increased Motivation**: Pink (2009) challenged the idea that people are mostly motivated by extrinsic rewards and that the more you paid someone the more productive they would be. Dik et al (2013) sought to distinguish between meaning in work – what is the importance of the work versus how important the work is to you – believing that, if the worker believes the work they are doing is important to them (or others with whom they are in a relationship), then that will give their work enhanced meaning. In so doing, they were building on the work of Bass (1985), who defined such outcomes as the hallmark of transformational leadership, through which impactful leaders

garnered trust, respect and admiration from their followers. Kahn and Fellows (2013) outline three dimensions that describe people who are fully engaged in their work: they are fully 'present' and absorbed in their work; they are connected with others working to the same ends or towards 'the bigger picture'; they are integrated so that they bring their energies and thoughts to work.

- **Social Capital**: Workplace relationships are central to the wellbeing of individuals and the effectiveness of organisations. Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) each describe social capital as the value created through networks and shared trust, which can enhance both personal agency and collective function. Lewis (2011) and Roffey (2016) show that positive interactions at work support resilience and reduce dysfunction, whilst Greany (2015) highlights how strong relational ties help organisations respond to change and build capacity.

Given the importance of positive work relationships, attempts have been made to define how such relationships can be developed. Roffey (2013, 2016) arrived at the ASPIRE principles (standing for Agency, Safety, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect and Equity), which incorporate relevant constructs, such as self-determination, trust, compassion and fairness, and how these might be translated into relational practices in the working environment.

The ASPIRE principles are as follows:

- **Agency**: Participants feel they are empowered to determine the conduct of the relationship, that their perspectives are valued, that information is provided to them in a non-controlling way and that they have the capacity to choose. In this way, agency 'incorporates one of the determinants of wellbeing – self-determination' (Roffey, 2016: 11).
- **Safety**: A hallmark of a healthy relationship is that the participants feel physically and emotionally safe; in other words, they are not subject to 'systematic and negative behaviours that cause humiliation and distress' (Trepanier et al, 2015). At its worst, this can mean bullying or threats but it

can also reflect a lack of transparency or honesty, leading to participants lacking confidence that their counterpart can be trusted.

- **Positivity**: Relationships are enhanced by both the experience and expression of positive emotions (Barsade & Gibson, 2007), whereas negativity undermines the ability to 'think straight'. However, both terms can be slippery to define. Dutton (2014) suggests positivity means being present in the moment, underscoring interactions with kindness and courtesy and, where possible, injecting 'fun' into the relationship through humour and warmth. Positivity can take on many forms: Seligman et al (2005) have shown how gratitude promotes a sense of optimism and of being noticed; Mukamel et al (2010) found that positivity can be 'mirrored' back as 'all emotions are contagious'; Wenner (2009) suggests that the very act of smiling can increase our wellbeing.
- **Inclusion**: Healthy relationships can only exist when participants feel there is a high level of commitment and connectedness. This is not to say those outside the relationship need to be demonised or scapegoated but, to develop a deep sense of belonging, there cannot be a sense of distance or indifference from either participant: there has to be an extent to which they are 'all in'.
- **Respect**: The first pathway to building high quality connections at work is to 'respectfully engage with others' (Dutton & Spreitzer, 2014). Respect is rarely achieved by participants relying on their own role or level of authority to induce respect from the other. Roffey (2016) suggests it is through acknowledging a mistake, active listening, showing an interest in what the other person has to offer and even simply greeting someone by name, with a smile, is going to garner respect. The long-established distinction between 'I-it' and 'I-thou' relationships by Buber (2002, after 1923) is relevant here. In 'I-it' relationships, participants see in the other little more than the role or the job title. The relationship is regarded as largely functional and impersonal. In 'I-thou' relationships, the connection with the other becomes much more holistic, the personal blending with the professional.
- **Equality**: This can be difficult to model in hierarchical organisations, given the blatant disparity that can exist within workplace relationships. How equality

can be maintained is through an inclusive and democratic work culture, a shared vulnerability and empathetic understanding. Equality can also be upheld by an acceptance of difference: the fact that participants will not have the same access to information, time available or commitments inside and outside of the workplace. For that reason, fairness is perhaps a better term to use than equality.

The ASPIRE framework underscores not just the value of workplace relationships but also the complex series of actions and interactions that comprise them. Whilst the extent of guidance available as to how such relationships should be formed and conducted is limited, as is discussed later in this chapter, this is not to say that the qualities listed in the framework are not exhibited or regarded as valuable in headteacher-CoG relationships.

2.3 The changing nature and purpose of governance.

From their earliest foundation, schools have been overseen by boards of governors or trustees, usually local lay people who would be expected to supervise expenditure and ensure that the school was well run. In Victorian times, these bodies were to attract some public interest, as people became aware of how the provision of education affected everybody, whether or not all children attended school (Sallis, 2001). Effective governance was regarded as important as it conferred upon the school an air of 'institutional legitimacy', a perspective which remains to this day:

> 'Put very simply, the effective governance of a school is central in ensuring that what the school does is right in terms of what wider society expects a school to do. It enhances the status of schools from being (simply) organisations to being institutions.'
>
> (Connolly & James, 2022: 6)

Concerned about differing practice between schools, two commissions set up in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Clarendon Commission and the Taunton Commission, defined the duties of the governors and the headteacher, with governors named as responsible for the curriculum and the headteacher and staff for its delivery. Governors would also appoint (and dismiss) the headteacher, oversee the budget, keep a watch on standards and ensure that the aims of the founders were honoured.

The Education Act of 1902 created a nationwide framework for schooling, with Local Education Authorities set up to plan and provide elementary and secondary education, including responsibility for the curriculum. As with later legislation, most notably the Education Act of 1944, the power and responsibilities of the state in terms of educational provision were transformed but the character of governance remained largely unchanged. However, from the mid-1960s, on the back of increasing controversy about teaching methods in primary school, alongside an increased appetite for parental participation in schools, governors and governance came under greater scrutiny, with some arguing that governors were following a party political rather than an educational agenda (Sallis, 2001: 154). The National Association of Governors and Managers was formed in the early 1960s in part to address concerns about the quality of governors.

The Taylor Committee of 1975-77 was set up to examine how schools made their decisions and to make recommendations on the composition of governing bodies and the respective roles of the LEA, governors and headteacher. The Committee recommended that governing bodies should have an equal partnership of LEA representatives, elected parents and elected teachers and that they should have 'a clear strategic role' (HMSO, 1977). This was enacted in legislation in the 1980s, as were increased powers for governing bodies as a whole, to reflect the Conservative government's desire to reduce the power of LEAs in favour of central government and school-based control, alongside a drive towards more testing, greater accountability and competition between schools. Sallis records how governing bodies got caught up in the political crossfire:

> 'This process – which teachers on the whole disliked – had very little to do with the role of the governing body, but inevitably some of the opposition from heads and teachers rubbed off.'
>
> (Sallis, 2001: 157)

The most significant legislation from this period was the Education Reform Act of 1988, which introduced greater autonomy for schools through local management of schools (LMS) and laid the foundations for market-based mechanisms within the education system. Subsequent legislation, such as the Education Act 2002, extended the statutory responsibilities of governing bodies, particularly in relation to school improvement, staffing and performance management. The Academies Act 2010, followed by the Education Act 2011, hastened a widespread shift towards academisation, enabling schools to operate independently of local authorities and establishing the legal and financial framework for the creation of MATs.

These legislative changes were underpinned by a neoliberal policy agenda that emphasised decentralisation, accountability and competition. Assumptions regarding the role of governing bodies also changed: instead of them principally being regarded as a vehicle for advancing local democratic oversight, they were now increasingly charged with the implementation of national priorities. This included not only traditional areas such as standards, behaviour and attendance but also a range of emergent concerns, including safeguarding (as mandated under Section 175 of the Education Act, 2002), equality and inclusion (under the Equality Act, 2010) and, more recently, the mental health and wellbeing of pupils (DfE, 2021). The increasing policy emphasis on safeguarding was reinforced through statutory guidance, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education (introduced in DfE, 2014a, and in annual updates thereafter), which assigns specific oversight duties to governors.

As the pace of academisation accelerated, particularly from 2010 onwards, governing bodies within academy schools experienced a transformation in both structure and function. Academies, especially those within MATs, are now no

longer governed by traditional boards of governors but by trust boards established under company law. The governance structure is defined by the Academy Trust Handbook (DfE, 2023), which outlines the responsibilities of trust boards and executive leadership. Within this framework, the role of local governing bodies (LGBs) has been diminished or reconfigured. LGBs, where they exist, often serve in an advisory or consultative capacity rather than as autonomous decision-making bodies. Their powers are delegated at the discretion of the MAT's board of trustees, meaning that significant governance functions, including finance, curriculum and staffing, are often centralised. The shift to all schools becoming academies, within a MAT structure, had already been anticipated by the previous government in a 2022 white paper (DfE, 2022), in which a fully trust-led system was envisioned. It remains to be seen whether the new Labour government (from 2024) will persist with this goal, given its recent ambiguity regarding the powers of academies within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2024-5) and the threat of emboldened opposition from the teaching unions (NEU, 2025).

This centralisation of authority nationally has had many implications for governance at school-level. Greany and Higham (2018) have demonstrated the far-reaching effects of this reform agenda and the impact it has had on how schools interact with government, local authorities and each other. The established purview of governance, which was largely focused inward on issues within the school, has now become fragmented, in a process they term 'chaotic centralisation'. What this means is that, instead of government policy engaging in a simple act of devolving power to schools (as its proponents suggested it did), governors and school leaders have had to adapt to considerable disruption to established patterns of policy, practice and accountability. As their findings revealed, pressures increased as they had to respond to: hierarchical initiatives, such as compliance of and standardisation, leading to 'high levels of stress'; market-based demands, as they had to compete for 'students, staff and/or status'; and stresses related to the formation of networks with other schools, especially where they 'were in competition or … were unable or unwilling to embrace these new approaches' (Greany & Higham, 2018: 15). Governance has therefore

become increasingly complicated, as individual schools, and increasingly MATs, develop innovative structures and practice to accommodate a rapidly evolving policy environment.

Although independent schools have had to react in part to this changing policy agenda – for example, their obligations towards safeguarding are the same as those in the state-funded sector – they have not been affected by the changes regarding structure and governance. In many cases, their founding principles remain the same as they have for decades. Figures from the Independent Schools Council indicate that, of their member schools, around half of independent schools in England hold charitable status. This means that roughly 1,210 out of the 2,421 independent schools in England are charities (Maisuria et al, 2024). The remainder are either led and managed by the proprietor or belong to an umbrella business of schools, usually run for profit. As some of these can be quite small and idiosyncratic, the independent school sample for this study is taken from those with charitable status.

Charity trustees are legally responsible for ensuring that a charity is properly governed and fulfils its aims. According to the Charity Commission for England and Wales (2018), trustees have five key legal duties: they must ensure the charity is carrying out its purposes for the public benefit; comply with the charity's governing document and the law; act in the best interests of the charity; manage the charity's resources responsibly; and act with reasonable care and skill. Trustees are expected to provide strategic oversight rather than manage day-to-day activities and they must always act collectively and independently, safeguarding the charity's assets, reputation and legal standing. Their governance role requires careful decision-making, adherence to legal and ethical standards and a commitment to the charity's mission and beneficiaries (Charity Commission, 2018). To that end, the emphasis of governance in an independent school is different, as, rather than being an arm of government, however semi-detached that might be, the focus instead is on upholding the aims and protecting the interests of the charity, although 'the general principles of effective governance

apply to independent schools as much as they apply to other schools, such as academies and schools maintained by local authorities' (Croner-i, 2021). Nevertheless, even though the vast majority do actually follow government policy in a range of areas (for example, most shadow National Curriculum requirements due to the need to adhere to examination specifications), they have been able to avoid the 'chaotic centralisation' outlined by Greany and Higham (2018).

2.4 The characteristics of governors.

Having established what governance is, we turn to what sort of people perform the role of governor. Research suggests that school governors in England do not always reflect the broader population in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. According to the NGA (NGA, 2024), the majority of governors are aged between 40 and 70, with relatively few under 40, despite younger adults making up a significant proportion of society. Gender representation is somewhat balanced but men remain overrepresented compared to the predominantly female teaching workforce (Governors for Schools, 2021a). Ethnic diversity is more limited, with only 3.5% of school governors identifying as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME), despite 23% of the UK population belonging to these groups (Governors for Schools, 2021a).

Career background significantly influences who becomes a governor, with many coming from professional sectors such as finance, law and business. As demands and expectations of governors have increased, and the requirement for specific professional competences has become more significant when governing bodies are looking to recruit, the emphasis placed on community representation has diminished (NGA, 2020). In turn, this focus has raised concerns about inclusivity, as some candidates from less privileged backgrounds have allegedly found it harder to access governance roles. Indeed, many governors are recruited through professional networks, reinforcing existing demographic patterns and limiting diversity (Tower Hamlets Council, 2021).

Motivation for becoming a governor varies, with some drawn to the role due to personal connections with a school, often because they have children enrolled (Governors for Schools, 2021b) or as former pupils of the school, a particularly fertile recruiting ground for independent school governors. Others see governance as an opportunity for professional development, using the role to enhance leadership and strategic skills (NGA, 2024). However, barriers such as time commitments and the perceived complexity of governance deter potential candidates, particularly those from underrepresented groups (Tower Hamlets Council, 2021). Efforts to broaden participation have included targeted recruitment campaigns, though achieving a fully representative governing body remains a challenge.

It is from within this governor population that CoGs are selected. Recent data (i.e. since 2020) on the characteristics of CoGs is limited but, given that they are typically elected from within governing bodies, it is likely that they reflect these same demographic patterns. Anecdotal evidence suggests that CoGs tend to be older, bearing in mind the increased time commitment required, something many in full-time work would find impossible.

2.5 The task of governing.

As guidance from the DfE (DfE, 2020a) makes clear, governors in English schools are not required to be involved in running the school on a daily basis but instead expected to focus on the school's long-term planning and accountability measures. Governors are there to ask questions, offer perspective and monitor the work of the school leadership – sometimes challenging decisions, sometimes backing them – but always with the aim of holding the school to account and supporting improvement. Their work can involve looking at data, discussing budgets and planning for the future needs to pupils, staff and the school estate. Much of this oversight, however, depends on how they regard the headteacher, which can often be seen through the prism of the headteacher's relationship with the CoG.

Prior to joining the board, it is likely that prospective governors will have had some contact with the headteacher. Some may have regarded this as a desirable first step prior to applying: guidance (DfE, 2013) states clearly the expectation that a meeting with the head is a precursor to appointment. For parent governors, who join the board following election, it is likely that they will already have a view or opinion about the headteacher and this may be a principal motivation for them wanting to join the board, whether positive or negative. These pre-existing opinions may only be partially correct and there may be an element of confirmation bias once their tenure begins, given the preconceptions that can exist about the role and nature of headteachers. Often dating from their own time at school, or potentially from literary or media depictions of headteachers, pre-existing expectations can distort the reality of the headteacher's role, power and responsibilities.

Ultimately, the work of governance is shaped by the interplay between formal responsibilities and interpersonal dynamics. In a context where leadership is increasingly relational (Gronn, 2002; James et al, 2010), understanding how governors and headteachers collaborate, negotiate and maintain boundaries becomes crucial. This study situates itself within that space, examining not just what CoGs are expected to do but how their responsibilities are enacted through relationships that are often informal, evolving and emotionally charged.

2.6 The role of the CoG.

Since the early 2000s, there has been an important shift in both scholarly and policy attention towards the role of CoGs, with them increasingly being seen as playing a pivotal role within governing bodies, particularly in their capacity to shape and support strategic leadership within the school. Grady (2001) found that CoGs had moved beyond being purely ceremonial figures to become increasingly proactive collaborators with headteachers, engaging in decision-making processes related to school improvement, staffing and performance management, thereby

blurring the once-distinct boundary between governance and executive leadership. Grady observed that many CoGs acted as mentors to headteachers, providing a sounding board for key decisions, whilst also managing the complex interpersonal dynamics of the governing body itself. However, this evolving role was both hugely time-consuming and undertaken without appropriate structures of support. Grady found that CoGs frequently operated in relative isolation, with limited access to peer networks or professional development tailored to the taxing challenges of governance leadership. This lack of systematic support risked inconsistencies in practice and highlighted the need for more formalised mechanisms of training and mentoring (Grady, 2001).

In 2013, the DFE clarified the expectations placed upon CoGs by emphasising their strategic responsibilities as opposed to involvement in day-to-day management. Guidance stated that 'the chair has a vital role in keeping the board focused on its core functions, and in ensuring it operates effectively, including through the active contribution of all its members' (DfE, 2013: 4) and highlighted the importance of having a Vice-CoG and encouraging consideration of leadership succession. Guidance in 2014 outlined essential duties, including fostering a strong governance culture, enhancing the board's effectiveness via team development and building a professional rapport with the headteacher (DfE, 2014b). Central to this framework was the CoG's dual role in both supporting and constructively challenging school leadership, the guidance including the phrase 'critical friend', although this has been sidelined in more recent iterations. This guidance signified a turning point in the evolution of the CoG's role, echoing wider reforms in public service aimed at strengthening leadership and ensuring greater accountability.

Contemporaneous guidance from the National College of Teaching & Leadership similarly emphasised the importance of the role: 'Being a chair of governors is a key role in the leadership and management of schools' (NCTL, 2014: 2). The same document summarised the main responsibilities as: leading the governing body so that there is clear direction; recruiting and training effective governors; ensuring school improvement is the focus of all policy and strategy; ensuring that statutory

requirements and regulations are met; building an effective relationship with the headteacher (NCTL, 2014: 2). In updated guidance, the NGA emphasised the breadth and importance of the role of CoG, recognising that this is not necessarily articulated in either legislation or guidance: 'As well as a leader, the chair is at times a confidant, a manager, a critical friend, a sounding board, a catalyst, a cheerleader, an ambassador, an arbitrator, a negotiator, a networker and possible a mentor or coach' (NGA, 2020: 12).

Whilst charitable organisations are required to have a chair of trustees, this is not always a substantial role and, in some, may be served on a rotation basis annually, or with a narrow remit of managerial leadership. The role of CoG is significantly more substantial: as Boyd (1998: 335) notes, CoGs have a time commitment considerably above the rest of the board, need to cooperate closely with the headteacher and bursar and must fulfil a leadership role within the school. To this extent, established practice within the charitable sector is not always helpful when defining the role of a CoG in an independent school.

Established practice, alongside guidance, has certainly helped the CoG to evolve into a pivotal figure both within and beyond the governing body. The literature suggests that there is no one model for the role. Kogan (1984: 103) identifies four types of CoG – the 'education committee chair', the 'consensual chair', the 'radical chair' and the 'single-handed chair' – and explains how these models differ in the way they handle the business of the governing body. Indeed, guidance and literature often seek to explain how best to manage meetings and cohere the disparate members of the body; in contrast, the relationship with the headteacher is often referred to only in outline.

2.7 The headteacher's relationship with governance and governors.

The relationship between headteachers and governing bodies has undergone considerable transformation over the past few decades. Traditionally, governors

occupied a relatively passive role, largely endorsing decisions made by the headteacher without significant scrutiny. However, with reforms to education governance and accountability, this dynamic shifted. Once the Education Reform Act 1988 had elevated the importance and role of governors, headteachers became compelled to engage more closely with governing bodies, not only to justify strategic decisions but to collaborate in shaping the school's overall direction (Gunter, 2011; Earley & Weindling, 2004). Headteachers are now expected to maintain a transparent and reciprocal relationship with governors. This includes regular reporting on performance data, budgetary matters, staffing and school improvement strategies. There is also an expectation that headteachers will involve governors early in strategic planning processes, rather than merely seeking their approval for plans drawn up by senior leaders. This evolution reflects a broader trend in public service governance, where oversight bodies are expected not only to monitor performance but to offer constructive challenge (Bush, 2020). As such, headteachers must balance operational autonomy with the need to build trust and demonstrate accountability to governors.

Recent guidance (DfE, 2020b) sets out formally what is expected of headteachers in relation to governance, stating that they should:

- understand and welcome the role of effective governance, upholding their obligation to give account and accept responsibility.
- establish and sustain professional working relationship with those responsible for governance.
- ensure that staff know and understand their professional responsibilities and are held to account.
- ensure the school effectively and efficiently operates within the required regulatory frameworks and meets all statutory duties.

(DfE, 2020b: 8)

However, the lack of detail as to how such guidance should be implemented can lead to tensions between headteachers and governors due to its ambiguity, leading to a wide variety of leadership styles, 'from democrat to despot' (Dingle,

2000). In mitigation, it could be argued that guidance will always need to be flexible and liable to interpretation by the postholder and the setting. Bossert et al (1982) felt that no one style is appropriate for all schools and that the headteacher had to find a role that was most suited to a particular school, a prime skill of leadership being the ability to determine which approach to use and on what occasion.

The National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), which was introduced in 1997, becoming compulsory from 2004 onwards, and the foundation of the National College for School Leadership in 2000, sought to 'provide a single national focus for school leadership development and research' (Bolam, 2004: 340) so that the role and conduct of the headteacher could be brought into sharper focus and, to an extent, standardised. The NPQH, however, provides little guidance on the headteacher-CoG relationship, the only significant focus on governors being a sample presentation that students are expected to prepare. Similarly, in the independent sector, where additional qualifications are regarded as desirable but rarely mandatory, relationships with governors are usually only examined in passing rather than as a principal focus.

The increased demands of accountability and transparency have, at times, strained the relationship between school leaders and governors. As Ofsted's inspection framework began placing more emphasis on governance effectiveness, headteachers found themselves under closer scrutiny, not only from inspectors but from within their own governing structures (Ofsted, 2023). This has encouraged some school leaders to take a more proactive stance in shaping the development of their governing bodies, such as through providing training and workshops on strategy to align visions and improve effectiveness (Bubb & Earley, 2013), in a process known colloquially as 'managing up'.

The process of academisation, alongside the introduction of trust frameworks such as MATs, has added new layers of authority and accountability for school leaders. Rather than working primarily with a single governing body, headteachers are now

required to navigate a more complex web of relationships, including trust boards, executive leaders and regional directors (Greany & Higham, 2018). While MAT structures may offer strategic coherence and consistency across schools, they also challenge traditional models of distributed leadership and raise concerns about the erosion of local democratic accountability in school governance (Allen & Gann, 2022). Such changes may also, in turn, to dilute the headteacher's relationship with the CoG, given the extra demands on both postholders' time and attention.

It is therefore likely that most novice headteachers will start in post with little direct knowledge of the CoG and how they should embark on a relationship with them. As a deputy or teacher-governor, they may have attended board meetings previously (at the same or a different school) or they may have been a governor in the past, perhaps as a parent. This experience will have given them some helpful insight but this knowledge will only take them so far. Each CoG will have their own way of leading and managing their board and each board is made up of different individuals, with their own background and connection to each other.

The new headteacher will soon find themselves having to navigate a whole set of new relationships, whether that be with pupils, parents, teachers or their leadership team. The cultural and professional subtext that sustains teacher-teacher, teacher-parent and teacher-pupil relationships is, however, not as apparent between headteacher and CoG. Little detailed advice is given as to how this relationship can and should work in practice, much being left to a belief in a 'personal chemistry' between the two participants. In some cases, this may not be an issue, especially as the CoG can sometimes play a large part in the headteacher's appointment, but people and circumstances can change, most notably when a new CoG is appointed or a school begins to enter more challenging circumstances.

2.8 The CoG's role as a 'critical friend' to the headteacher.

The term 'critical friend' has often been used as a simplified way of describing the relationship between the CoG and the headteacher. The phrase, which originated in the 1970s, first entered common usage when Costa and Kallick (1993) provided a widely cited definition:

> 'A trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.'
>
> (Costa & Kallick, 1993: 50)

Since then, the term has been adopted across various professional fields to describe a role that combines support with constructive critique. The relationship between the CoG and the headteacher is one such example and the following is one way this has been described:

> '… Being a critical friend by offering support, challenge and encouragement, holding the headteacher to account and ensuring the headteacher's performance management is rigorous and robust; a good comparison is with the role of the chair of a board of trustees who works with the chief executive of an organisation but does not run day-to-day operations.'
>
> (NCTL, 2014: 2)

Brighouse and Woods (2013) provided another:

> '[A] 'critical friend' [is as an external person] 'who understands and is sympathetic to the purpose of the school, knows its circumstances very well, is skilled in offering a second opinion about an issue. Critical friends are seemingly effortlessly skilled at asking questions. They bring to that questioning task a mastery of inflection and timing, so that questions are never damaging … Governing bodies act as critical friend to a school, providing the head teacher and staff with support, advice and information, drawing on members' knowledge and experience.'
>
> (Brighouse & Woods, 2013)

Although it has now disappeared from official government guidance (anecdotally because of concern about the use of 'friend' rather than 'critical'), it still persists as a shorthand term, perhaps because it comes closest for many to describing the two key components of the role. For example, the Association of Colleges (AoC) stated that it believed 'the idea of being a critical friend can be a helpful way of describing the relationship between college governors and college managers [as] it captures a combination of support and challenge, but challenge that is constructive and not hostile' (AoC, 2014: 2). A further paragraph encapsulates the ideal of such a close relationship:

> 'The notion of a critical friend indicates a relationship that is open, trusting, transparent and built on mutual respect. Critical questions are not seen as a threat but as helpful interventions to achieve mutually shared aims. Questions are not asked to try to catch people out but to enable a clearer understanding of issues and how they can be resolved. Based on trust, probing questions are asked to verify that what is being reported and proposed is built on sound analysis and appropriate and deliverable actions.'
>
> (AoC, 2014: 2)

However, most writers acknowledge that both the term – and its manifestation – can be problematic. Researchers, such as Doherty et al (2001) and Curry (2008), argue that the critical friend is not a neutral figure. The role can shift depending on the context and may involve tension, especially when balancing the need to support with the need to challenge. This makes the position inherently flexible but also open to misinterpretation or inconsistency. MacBeath and Jardine (1998) suggest that the term contained 'an inherent tension':

> 'Friends bring a high degree of unconditional positive regard. Critics are, at first sight at least, conditional, negative and intolerant of failure. Perhaps the critical friend comes closest to what might be regarded as 'true friendship' – a successful marrying of unconditional support and unconditional critique'.
>
> (MacBeath & Jardine, 1998: 41)

This certainly sets a very high bar indeed for the headteacher-CoG relationship. The NGA, however, flatly rejects the notion that this is a friendship, referring instead to it as a 'professional relationship [based on] honesty and respect' (NGA, 2020: 47). However, it recognises 'shared values', 'personal compatibility', 'a generosity of spirit' and 'an atmosphere of trust' as 'fundamental to a good relationship' (NGA, 2020: 47).

Indeed, it is this specific tension – as to how far friendship and professionalism are incompatible – that causes the most discomfort. Professionalism can, of course, mean different things depending on the setting but it usually includes having specialist knowledge, acting responsibly, staying within ethical boundaries and being open to learning and development over time (Evetts, 2014). In schools, especially in leadership or support roles like that of a 'critical friend', professionalism also means managing relationships carefully. There is often a need to be supportive without becoming too personally involved. Older definitions of professionalism tended to stress emotional distance and clear lines of authority (Freidson, 2001). However, these views have been questioned by researchers who focus more on trust and collaboration. 'Critical friends' are expected to build trust and work closely with school leaders, which can start to look like friendship. Some researchers worry that this could blur boundaries or make it harder to give honest feedback (Schuck, 2011; Curry, 2008).

Some recent studies have therefore regarded the concept more favourably, essentially arguing that it was better to focus on the term holistically than semantically. Dunn (2025) suggests that critical friendship can take different forms. For example, one type of critical friend may focus on mentoring, another on providing specific expertise and another on helping leaders connect with wider networks. These approaches are not mutually exclusive and a single person may shift between them depending on the context. What matters most is the ability to read the situation and respond appropriately. This view connects with constructivist theories of learning, which suggest that professional development is most effective when it is built around dialogue, reflection and shared

understanding. In this sense, the critical friend becomes part of a learning process rather than simply offering external judgement. The strength of the relationship lies in its flexibility and the trust that underpins it. Similarly, MacPhail et al (2024) argue that those working in this capacity need to be adaptable. They must give honest feedback without damaging relationships. The lack of a fixed definition is both a strength and a limitation, depending on how well the boundaries are understood by those involved. In practice, the critical friend often shifts between being a colleague, a mentor and a source of challenge, depending on what the situation calls for.

As suggested above, it is possible to become overfocused on the wording of the concept rather than the concept itself. Perhaps an overarching conclusion can be that, if both parties understand the purpose of the relationship and are committed to the same goals, then a mix of personal connection and professional challenge can be productive. Rather than seeing professionalism and friendship as opposites, it is encouraging that some writers now suggest that the two can work together, especially in schools, where trust and dialogue are central to effective leadership. In such contexts, being professional does not mean being distant or dispassionate but instead knowing how to support others without losing sight of the shared responsibility to foster improvement and development.

2.9 Key issues within the headteacher-CoG relationship.

The most comprehensive guidance for CoGs as to how to foster effective relationships with headteachers appears within 'The Chair's Handbook', produced by the NGA (NGA: 2020). This explains many of the key issues within the relationship and suggests practical steps as to how any potential tensions can be resolved amicably. The guidance makes clear that the relationship depends principally on both CoGs and headteachers appreciating the potential issues (or pitfalls) and that both parties should enter into a discussion early on about their

respective roles and how they will engage with each other. These are summarised as follows:

- Mission: a shared understanding of the organisation's purpose and strategic priorities.
- Ethical leadership: a shared understanding of the Nolan principles and virtues.
- Roles: defined and respected, with the emphasis on preventing overlaps and territorial disputes.
- Expectations on behaviours: discussed and understood.
- Mature communication: dispassionate and high-quality communication is essential.
- No surprises: should ensure each other is aware of any important and relevant developments.
- Public unity: chair and head should present a united public front on issues of fundamental importance.
- Mutual support, challenge and advice: be willing to act as confidential 'sound boards'.
- Mutual care, trust and respect: giving credit and thanks with generosity of spirit to each other and all involved in the shared enterprise.

(NGA, 2020: 43)

In part arising from issues examined in the handbook, this research will address four significant aspects in detail: the appointment process; the nature of communication; the balance between support and challenge (the key tension within 'critical friend'); and the potential tension between strategical and operational responsibilities.

2.9.1 The appointment and induction of the headteacher.

The appointment of the headteacher is one of the most important tasks for any governing body and the CoG in particular. It may also be one that many governors look forward to, as it can be their most obvious opportunity to effect substantial change within the leadership of the school. The precise manner in which headteachers are appointed will vary from school to school, although DfE guidance (DfE, 2017), produced in conjunction with the NGA, does set out in some detail

how an appointment process for headteachers should be run in state-funded schools.

Within the guidance, the CoG is specifically cited on five occasions (DfE, 2017):

1. To provide a covering letter within the application pack.
2. To contact the successful candidate.
3. To provide feedback for unsuccessful candidates.
4. To ensure 'a timely and formal handover from the outgoing post holder' (DfE, 2017: 30).
5. To 'arrange for the appraisal cycle and review meetings with the new appointee to be scheduled so that a framework for support is established at the outset, including mentoring and coaching support options if appropriate' (DfE, 2017: 30).

This suggests that the involvement of the CoG in the appointment is little more than administrative but anecdotal evidence suggests that the process by which a headteacher is appointed can have a lasting impact on their future relationship with the CoG, especially if the CoG has been able to interact individually with the successful candidate. Indeed, in the independent sector in particular, final interview rounds often involve social engagement beyond formal assessment. Several studies note how assumptions formed during recruitment, by both candidate and governors, may set the tone for future interactions and shape mutual expectations in ways that are not always consciously acknowledged (Earley & Weindling, 2004). In such contexts, the concept of 'fit', common in independent schools and frequently used by recruitment agencies, reflects not just professional alignment but also subjective impressions shaped by the governors' own values and experiences. MacBeath (2006) critiques the notion of 'fit' as potentially leading to the selection of leaders who conform to existing norms, potentially stifling innovation and diversity in leadership styles. The reliance on informal or implicit criteria also raises questions about transparency and objectivity in leadership appointments. The legacy of previous leaders, whether positive or problematic, can shape how new appointees are perceived and received, with emotional and political undercurrents influencing both confidence and continuity.

The headteacher – or, indeed, a CoG who is new to the board – may therefore be placed in a position of having to engineer a relationship in a context of known and unknown unknowns relating to previous postholders. This is a point sometimes overlooked by writers on the headteacher-CoG relationship. Sallis outlines ways in which headteachers and governors can establish a positive relationship based upon clear boundaries, mutual trust and clear communication (Sallis, 2001: 12-15). There is little one can argue about in her analysis, except that it is rare for headteachers and CoGs to embark upon their relationship from the same starting point. It is almost inevitable that established patterns of communication and the terms of a relationship will already be in place, which the 'newcomer' will have to adapt to and, probably in an evolutionary manner, adjust tactfully and with care. In this sense, as elsewhere, the leadership style of the headteacher (or CoG) will need to reflect that of their predecessor, whether positively or negatively.

Cultural legacy can also cast a long shadow. Glatter (2021) has written of schools as institutions rather than organisations due to them having 'a commitment to a set of values beyond the inculcation of knowledge and skills': in other words, 'an institutional identity' (Glatter, 2021: 49). However, one could go a lot further. Most schools are, to some extent, underpinned by an historical context. Independent schools immerse themselves in their past, with the school calendar peppered with commemorations and traditions, which entrench their prescriptive legitimacy. Faith schools also have a considerable legacy to maintain: indeed, their adherence to a faith, and the reason for its existence, will be central to their ethos as a school and usually their admissions criteria. Other state-funded schools may not be able, or may not prefer, to draw upon centuries of history but few operate in a vacuum and, given recent emphasis on branding and marketing, many will wish to demonstrate how their aims and ethos define what they are as an institution. A significant number of parents in all institutions may also have attended the school as children, bringing with them expectations of the school and its values. On appointment, headteachers and CoGs may therefore need to contend with a complex series of cultural shibboleths, some of which aid the early passage of their relationship, others hinder.

2.9.2 Communication.

Most writers agree that the key to headteacher-governor relationships, and that between the headteacher and CoG in particular, is effective communication and much of the CoG's understanding of the school will be derived from information reported formally to the board. The Education Act 2002 states the following obligation on the headteacher:

> 'The headteacher of a maintained school in England or Wales shall provide the governing body with such reports in connection with the discharge of his functions as may be required (either on a regular basis or from time to time) by the governing body for the purposes of the exercise of any of their functions.'
>
> (Education Act, 2002, Section 30)

There is no equivalent law for academies or independent schools but, in all schools, at least in theory, governors will expect the headteacher to supply them with the required information to help them fulfil their principal functions. In reality, this may mean that headteachers prioritise the factual over the reflective, focusing on attainment data, staffing statistics and factual overviews. In most circumstances, this will be adequate and appropriate, as governors seek to assess performance against previously agreed strategy.

Suggested good practice (Lee, 2021) is for information from the headteacher to be published to governors so that they can read it in advance and that only questions on the report should be accepted within the meeting. Such an approach only works if the report has actually been read but, by only permitting questions rather than a rounded discussion, the impression can be given, especially for those who have not read the report, that the report is received negatively, as it is likely that questions will focus on the issues of concern within the report rather than the achievements. More challenging perhaps is when a headteacher needs to communicate more nuanced information or draw the governors into a more complex aspect of school strategy. If the information supplied to governors is too extensive or elaborate, then the governors may become confused; if it is too

streamlined or straightforward, they may not fully appreciate the scope of what is proposed or the potential ramifications.

More significant perhaps for the headteacher-CoG relationship are the informal points of contact and communication. It is possible that the CoG will be the one person to whom the headteacher can speak candidly about how they are coping, both professionally and personally, in what may be an entirely new environment. Likewise, the CoG will rely heavily on the headteacher's professional judgement and capabilities to deliver the strategic priorities of the board. However, perhaps given its complex and sensitive nature, this relationship can often be a secret one. Both parties are bound by confidentiality and neither would necessarily gain should their discussions and dealings become known to large sections of the school community.

There is no specific guidance about how often the headteacher and CoG should communicate, in whatever form that may take. Advice from online governor advice forums, such as The Key (2024), only give outline suggestions as to what contact between the two should entail. This mentions establishing a clear purpose to meetings as a 'confidential space to discuss sensitive issues, and allow both parties to reflect on challenges' and how it is 'important to set a clear agenda for each meeting [to focus] on strategic priorities and any pressing matters that need attention', although the frequency of such meetings is at the participants' discretion and the list of likely topics for discussion is vague (The Key, 2024). Currently, there is little research evidence to show whether this is occurring in practice, hence this being one of the focus points of this study.

2.9.3 Support and challenge.

Legislation and government guidance often emphasise the importance of support and challenge as key parts of a governor's role. Balarin et al (2008) trace the origins of this idea to the work of Daloz in the mid-1980s, who made a significant

contribution by clearly distinguishing between support and challenge. Daloz described support as an activity that involves holding and providing a safe space where the individual can find fundamental trust. According to Daloz (1986), this kind of support includes listening carefully, offering structure, expressing positive expectations, advocating for the other person, sharing oneself within the relationship and making the connection meaningful and special.

Hence, support, in Daloz's model, is 'not about supporting the other, as, for example, football supporters support their favourite club, or agreeing with, backing and helping with everything the other wants them to do' (Balarin et al, 2008: 34) but instead about a more complex joint mission or 'vision' which 'is a metaphorical map of the journey to be travelled with appropriate support and challenge' (Balarin et al, 2008: 34). Other writers and organisations have also sought to clarify these terms:

> Headteachers are the experts in their field, but they won't always be the experts on things outside of their remit, like finance and law. Governors can support the headteacher in areas such as these, using their professional knowledge to benefit the school. However, supporting the headteacher effectively includes respecting their expertise and trusting their judgement, when backed up with evidence.
>
> In a similar vein, supporting the headteacher doesn't mean blindly supporting anything and everything that they suggest. Instead, governors should support them to succeed by listening to the answers to questions rather than seeing it as 'job done' once the question has been asked.
>
> (Governors for Schools, 2021b)

As they have been appointed by them, it is perhaps natural for headteachers to expect that governors will give them their full support. However, governors may want to show that their support should not be taken for granted; some governors use the term 'trustee' to highlight the fact that they are guardians of the school in the widest possible sense, not necessarily cheerleaders for the headteacher.

This is perhaps when the CoG becomes of most value, as an effective bridge between the headteacher and the board, especially if their relationship has strengthened over time following regular and extensive one-to-one contact. However, it may well be the case that the bond of loyalty between headteacher and CoG is not strong and that, in the case of dispute, the CoG feels more responsible towards supporting the views of the board instead of backing the headteacher. The role of Clerk to the Governors is sometimes cited as someone who could intervene in such circumstances but, if an outsider, they may feel powerless to become involved or, if an insider, they may prefer not to become embroiled in matters beyond their control. Even if more dramatic action is not taken, it is possible that the headteacher could be left feeling quite isolated from the board and without a natural ally or supporter to turn to.

2.9.4 Strategic and operational.

One of the key tensions that potentially exists between headteachers and CoGs, and, by extension, the governing body, concerns strategy, and how it is devised and delivered, and operational matters.

As previously identified, legislation clearly states the responsibility of the governing body for the strategic direction of the school. However, guidance from the NGA (NGA, 2018: 3) reminds governors that they need to be aware as to 'where their strategic responsibilities end and the responsibilities of the senior executive leader begin … Stepping over the line into operational matters is inappropriate and can make the job of the senior executive leader more difficult.'

The NGA emphasises that the devising of strategy 'should be an exercise undertaken by the whole governing board, the senior executive leader and the senior executive leadership team'. Interestingly, a survey in 2015 illustrated that the contribution of the constituent parts within this process was not always universally understood: 'almost 9 in 10 of 1,300 governors surveyed … placed

themselves top of the list of people who should influence policies in individual schools, followed by the school leadership team, then the headteacher. However, 81% of school leaders believe they should be the ones most influencing policy. Just 63% thought governors should have any influence at all' (Phillips, 2015). Within the same article, Tony Draper, president of the NAHT, stressed that governance was 'strategic' and management 'operational' and that the distinction needed to be 'clearly understood by all, so that governors and trustees are not asked to, and do not try to, involve themselves in day-to-day management'. Whilst this is clear in principle, the survey suggested it was 'not so clear [in its] strategy and implementation' (Phillips, 2015).

James et al (2012) refer to CoGs as 'boundary workers' having to manage 'what crosses the boundary into and out of the governing system' so that what the governors are dealing with is definitely strategic, whilst ensuring that headteachers are not making strategic decisions within the operational sphere. In practice, however, all school business has both a strategic and operational aspect: as policy is implemented, any ramifications, big or small, may well blur the boundary even further. The research was therefore framed to investigate how far this was understood within the sampled relationships.

2.9.5 Appraisal.

One mechanism through which the headteacher can be supported or challenged is the appraisal process. In maintained schools, this process is set out in a range of guidance, most significantly the statutory instrument of 2012 (DfE, 2012) but also documents such as the National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (DfE, 2020b). Academies and independent schools are expected to have an appraisal process in place but this is not required in law but is regarded as 'best practice'. In HMC, for example, headteachers are expected to be appraised at least once every three years (Synergia, 2025).

If well managed, the appraisal process could mitigate some of the potential risks of the support and challenge function due to there being regular opportunities for issues to be raised and discussed between the parties prior to them having a negative impact. However, the appraisal process can call into question the 'friend' aspect of the relationship should the judgements of the appraisal appear too critical or unrealistic.

2.10 The CEO-Chair relationship in non-school settings.

The relationship between the CEO and the chair of the board in non-school settings offers further insight into how leadership and governance can function as a productive partnership. This has received much more substantial and detailed attention in recent years, such as in the UK Corporate Governance Code (FRC, 2018), or in sector-specific guidance, such as the Association of Colleges' Code of Good Governance for English Colleges (AoC, 2015, amended 2019). The Cadbury Report (Cadbury, 1992) emphasised the importance of separating the roles of Chair and CEO and how each should have distinct responsibilities.

The research of James et al (2012) on the board chair's responsibilities in non-school settings is particularly pertinent when it comes to the inner workings of the headteacher-CoG relationship. The research makes clear the importance of the chair and CEO delineating their roles 'in order to avoid misunderstandings and tensions' (Exworthy and Robinson, 2001: 87). Usually, this is as a result of discussion between the two participants early in the relationship. Stewart (1991) argues that this is not an easy task, due to their being overlapping 'domains' and concerns. This overlapping needs to be acknowledged by both parties and accommodated within differing arrangements, this requiring considerable self-knowledge and acuity. He characterised the differing roles as follows, stressing that they are not mutually exclusive but that the relationship can change according to time and circumstance:

1. Partner – the board chair and the CEO share the management of the organization.
2. Executive – the board chair directs the CEO and other managers to take actions – or forbid actions.
3. Mentor – the board chair acts in a way similar to that of a coach and counsellor in order to influence the CEO's behaviour to a positive effect.
4. Consultant – the board chair waits to be approached by the CEO for advice.
5. Distant – the board chair's role is mainly that of chairing meetings and attending obligatory external meetings.

(Adapted from Stewart, 1991: 522)

Whilst much of the literature tends to focus on the chair's relationship with the management of the organisation as a whole, rather than just the CEO, some writers have been keen to stress the importance of the particular relationship, Burton (2000), Ng and De Cock (2002) stressing its effect on overall board performance.

Kakabadse et al (2010) concur with the relationship being important but also stress its complexity, stating that 'the 'chemistry' of the relationship has two elements analytical interpretive capacity (sense-making) and deep friendship (philos)'. The first of these elements relates to the ability of both parties to exchange information, opinions and perspectives about the organisation in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of it. Roberts (2002) suggests that this can only occur through a high level of trust, engendered by open and regular communication and a willingness to learn and listen. The second emphasises the importance of 'mutual caring and emotional support in securing an appropriate relationship as opposed to hostility, indifference, dominance, reliance on logic or friendly submission' (James et al, 2012: 27). Forbes and Milliken (1999) emphasise the importance of the chair offering both challenge and support, helping to steer the board without encroaching on the CEO's executive function. They argue how regular and structured communication, and agreed protocols for how issues are raised and addressed, contribute to a healthy working dynamic.

The comparative research undertaken by Otto (2003) is particularly relevant for this study as she contrasts the CEO-chair relationship in statutory and voluntary organisations, concluding that, whilst, in all settings, 'ambiguity and conflict in the board chair and CEO roles were features', board chairs and CEOs of voluntary organisations did find 'sorting out the allocation of responsibility and authority particularly problematic' (Otto, 2003: 147). She suggests that this arises from the fact that voluntary organisations combine part-time/time-limited volunteers and full-time paid managers, have no statutory role and are run by people 'driven by deeply-held personal values'. Furthermore, the Chair has to combine the role of line manager with being 'a trusted friend and supporter', which she finds problematic (Otto, 2003: 147).

2.11 Conclusion to Chapter 2.

This chapter has sought to place the discussion of the headteacher-CoG relationship within its broader historical and legislative context. Given that much of the existing guidance remains limited in scope and lacking in detail, the literature in some ways raises more questions than it resolves. In reviewing this material, the chapter has aimed to highlight key tensions and ambiguities that define the relationship and explore how it is constructed and experienced in practice. Particular attention has been given to the relational dynamics at play, including the evolving interpretation of terms such as 'critical friend', 'support and challenge' and the often-contested boundary between the strategic and the operational. This discussion is intended to provide a foundation for Chapter 3, which introduces the theoretical framework of the research.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction.

Thomson and Heffernan (2021) describe a theoretical framework as 'the overall explanation that is used to provide coherence and focus to a research project and the subsequent thesis/report/papers' (Thomson & Heffernan, 2021: 161), in that it provides a structure and parameters within which the study can take place and a level of intellectual integrity which lends its findings a degree of transferability. The writers argue that the theoretical framework may be applied before, during or after the research has taken place or it may indeed arise from within the research itself. Although, in this instance, the eventual theoretical framework was not settled upon until after the data collection had taken place, there had been evolutionary steps towards this outcome early in the research process.

3.2 Evolving theoretical perspectives.

The literature demonstrates widespread recognition that the relationship between headteacher and CoG is an important one. Some sources suggest a relatively simple approach to making it effective; others highlight that this will only come about after considerable discussion and training but that, if these steps are followed, then the relationship can function well. The contention of this research is that this relationship is anything but simple, both individuals being subject to extrinsic and intrinsic influences and audiences that shape and reshape the relationship's parameters. Likewise, there is a dynamic interplay of factors within the relationship that change its inner workings over time. The relationship is therefore never static and, as a result, far from simple in its manifestation. Indeed, the headteacher-CoG relationship could be seen as a 'wicked' problem, a notion introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973) to their analysis of the US planning system. Their definition of wicked – "malignant' (in contrast to 'benign'), 'vicious' (like a circle), 'tricky' (like a leprechaun), 'aggressive' (like a lion)' – was intended

to delineate the absolutes of science from the insoluble and unpredictable components of social science. For example, they state that 'every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem' (Rittel & Webber, 1973: 165): any attempt to solve that problem will more than likely lead to other, and even bigger problems, elsewhere. Such 'wicked' problems are symptomatic of complex systems.

This led me initially, therefore, to adopt complexity theory as a lens through which to identify and understand the disparate factors at work within this relationship and how they interconnect and develop over time. This approach highlighted how the headteacher-CoG relationship is forged and then developed on the back of a wide range of complex and interrelated influences. Figure 3.1 was devised as a way of identifying just a few of these.

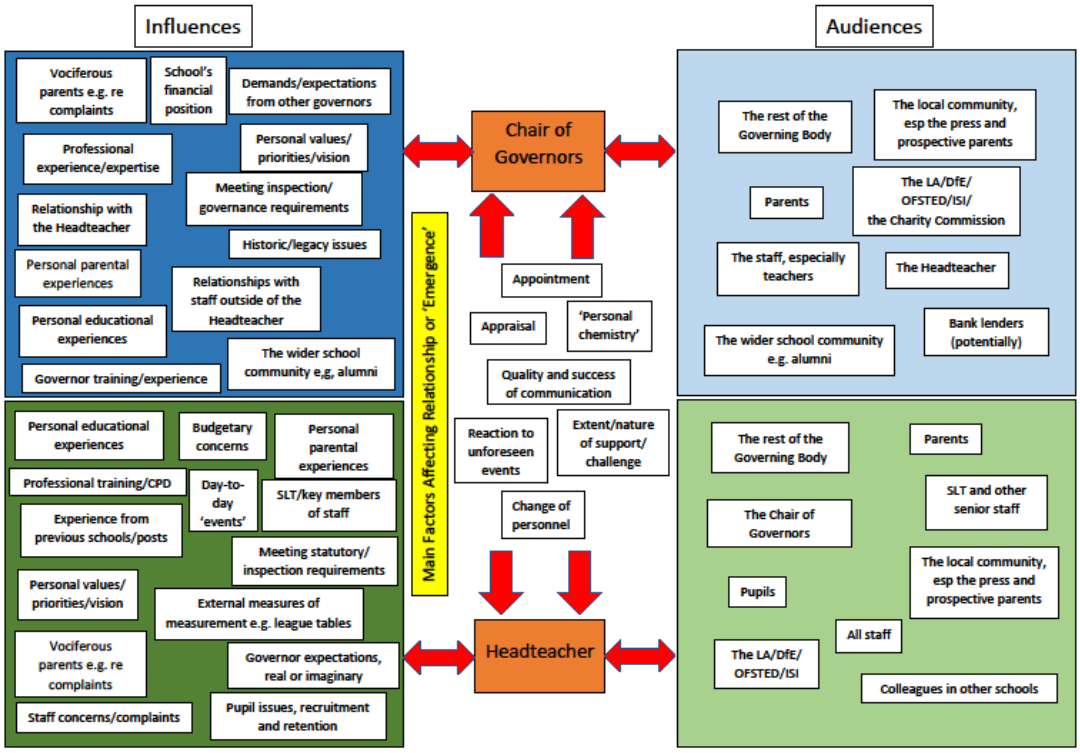

Figure 3.1: The dynamics at work within the complex relationship between headteacher and CoG.

Focusing on complexity theory, however, led to two concerns about the direction of the research. The first relates to a degree of confusion about whether the relationship was complex or just complicated. Figure 3.1 shows that the relationship is undoubtedly complicated but not all of the factors listed are complex: that is, there are many working parts but a lot of these are anticipated and predictable. Complexity relates to factors or issues which are neither of these. This is not to say that there are not complex issues at work within the relationship nor that some of the complications can have complex elements but it was perhaps inappropriate to place the study within the field of complexity theory, particularly regarding generalizability and how far a study based on complexity theory could make recommendations for other practitioners within similar relationships. The second concern was that the study would end up concentrating more on the organisation – and organisational theory – and less on the relationship itself.

Weick's (1995) insights into 'coupling' and sensemaking suggested a way of reconciling these concerns. He argued that, in complex organisations, such as schools, connections and relationships tend to be 'loose' rather than 'tight' due to the fact that individual components of the system do not need to be permanently and inextricably linked to each other in order to function effectively. The headteacher-CoG relationship is an example of 'loose coupling', as both participants have distinct and separate roles which only intersect momentarily and partially, relative to their other duties and responsibilities. This is in contrast, however, to the perception that the headteacher and CoG need to act in 'lockstep', in what some may expect should be a 'tightly coupled' relationship.

The headteacher-CoG relationship is therefore 'loosely coupled' due to the participants' contrasting roles and responsibilities, their (most likely) different status within the organisation and the lack of a precise structure and rationale for the relationship. The participants therefore are required to establish, develop and understand the relationship through 'sensemaking', which becomes necessary when, due to the lack of explicit parameters and understandings, individuals arrive

at their own sets of 'rules' and procedures in order to make 'sense' of the situation or circumstances.

The work undertaken on both complexity theory and Weick's 'sensemaking' did much to inform the initial thinking regarding the headteacher-CoG relationship. What was lacking, however, was a fully-formed 'centre' to the research and this was ultimately provided through the use of Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) as the research's principal theoretical lens, although, as the research developed, additional conceptual tools, such as Foucault's conceptualisation of power, were utilised.

LMX was explained most cogently by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) but has been extended and developed by many other academics since. Section 3.4 explores the history of LMX, with Section 3.3 providing some context regarding broader issues surrounding relational leadership.

3.3 Relational leadership.

As has already been established, relationships at work are important and, as a result, writers have sought to identify how such relationships can be improved. However, impactful relationships can also be an essential component of leadership: indeed, with the headteacher-CoG relationship, the quality of the relationship will signify the quality of leadership and vice-versa. This is why writers such as Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) have sought to address the two within one paradigm.

Relational leadership is still a relatively new concept and writers sometimes struggle to define exactly what is meant by it. There is probably more consensus on what it is not, in that it distances itself from the more 'heroic' forms of leadership, such as instructional leadership and managerial leadership, as documented by writers such as Bush and Glover (2014), where the focus is more

on the personal qualities of the individual. It does this on three counts. The first is that it focuses on leadership that is not done 'to' but 'with' someone. It takes as read that leadership depends as much on the led as it does on the leader. Only through a successful outcome to the interplay between participants in such relationships can effective leadership emerge. The second is that relational leadership deliberately focuses on the day-to-day existence of leadership, moving from complex conceptualisation of what leadership can be to lived experiences, identities and realities. The third is that, rather than viewing relationships from the standpoint of individuals as discrete and individual entities, 'a 'relational' approach starts with processes and not persons, and views persons, leadership and other relational realities as *made in* processes' (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) based their research on relational leadership within a social constructionist ontology 'which posits that we exist in a mutual relationship with others and their surroundings and that we both shape, and are shaped by, our social experience in everyday interactions and conversations' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1432). Social constructionism argues that not all of the fundamental structures and rules of our lives are pre-existing and set in stone but, rather, need to be constructed anew by individuals as a part of a society. (Shotter, 2008) As a result, these structures and rules are not fixed but open to dispute and challenge. This is an appropriate standpoint for this research, as it reflects the reality that, in a context where there is no clear guidance as to how the headteacher-CoG relationship should be practised, it is up to the participants to create and curate how, when and why they interact. To that end, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) set out four conceptual threads that run through relational leadership and it is these that will be used to shape my research also.

The first sets relational leadership within a social constructionist paradigm, where our understanding of ourselves and the world around us is formed through interaction and discussion with others. Qualities of leadership, such as 'character', are evident not as intrinsic qualities of individuals but as palpable catalysts within the relationship: 'Character is embedded and expressed within conversations not

as trait or constructs, but as a way of being-in-relation-to-others that brings a moral responsibility to treat people as human beings, of having 'a heart', appreciating others, and encouraging them to grow and learn from each other' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1433).

The second emphasises how communication within relational leadership is dialogical rather than monological. They deploy Bakhtin's concept of 'living conversation' (1996, 2002), which is about talking 'with' people not 'to' them, 'understanding that meaning emerges in specific moments of responsive conversation' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1434). In practice, this means that both participants view communication within the relationship as dynamic and reciprocal, where listening and a willingness to understand different perspectives, value ideas and establish relationships is prioritised. What and how something is said effectively underscores how the relationship is conducted, with dialogism enshrining how each participant values the other: how conversations are never final, ongoing dialogue is valued, differences are respected and possibilities for action arise from those differences. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) acknowledge that such honest and open dialogue is not always easy, referring to Bakhtin (1996), who regards conversation as 'a process of interaction and struggle, characterised by 'heteroglossia', intersecting ideologies, ways of speaking, value judgements and so on' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1436). Within the best relationships, conversations are about valuing and resolving differences and not minimising or dismissing them. Relational leaders are thus 'open to the present moment and to future possibilities … [engaging] in questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting dialogue' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1437).

The third upholds the importance of 'relational integrity', whereby leaders accept the need to be 'sensitive, attuned and responsive to moments of difference' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1438) and to work towards ways of resolving these differences. Emphasised here is the moral positioning of the leader: resolution is not regarded as a means of practical problem-solving but as an extension of their personal values and judgement. In so doing, they are modelling Ricoeur's concept

of 'ethical selfhood' (Ricoeur, 1992), whereby leaders are prepared to reshape their reality through their relational interactions. For Ricoeur, while 'character' is important, the individual is not of sole significance. What is more important is 'the ethics of reciprocity': how the value of what a leader does can only be fully assessed through assessing the response of others. In other words, actions need to be judged by reactions.

The fourth reflects an approach to sensemaking, in which relational leaders avoid making snap judgements based on prior assumptions but instead adopt a form of knowing that embraces shared meaning-making, responsive dialogue and active listening through discussion with others. This is not a world away from Aristotle's concept of 'phronesis' or practical wisdom, in which leaders recognise the importance of being responsive to the present moment when problem-solving. An additional explanation of relational theory given by Uhl-Bien (2006) suggests two principal perspectives. Entity perspectives view individuals within relationships as possessing 'the capacity to reason, to learn, to invent, to produce, and to manage' (Hosking et al, 1995: x) and that leadership within a relationship is a two-way process between two individuals (or more if it is between a leader and a group) in order primarily to attain mutual goals. Within relational perspectives, it is the relationship that is the more significant determinant of its conduct and outcome and, in so doing, becomes more than the sum of its constituent parts: 'Whereas entity approaches focus their attention on the quality and type of interpersonal relationships that occur among individuals and groups, relational perspectives emphasise the *relational* (i.e. *'in relation to'*) – they view multiple realities of self and other as coevolving, or constructed 'in relation' (Hosking, 2006).

The contrast between these two perspectives should not be exaggerated, however. Whilst participant agency features within entity perspectives, the interplay and interdependence between the participants, and the opportunity to co-create the relationship – i.e. that which is greater than the two individuals in isolation – is still evident; likewise, relational perspectives differ from entity

perspectives principally in their analysis of communication and connection, looking largely at what lies within and beneath, how processes are devised rather than what those processes are or, how, rather than what, is said. An entity approach focuses primarily on leadership in conditions of already 'being organised' while a relational approach considers leadership as 'a process or organising' (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 662).

For this study, I believe both approaches are valid and of use. Headteachers and CoGs exist in a relationship together because it is expected of them. Although guidance, and convention to a greater extent, expect the two to come together to form a fruitful partnership, just how that should be done is not obvious or apparent, certainly not in any depth. The individuals concerned are therefore responsible for initiating and then enacting the relationship. It is perfectly possible for this to remain as it is: two individuals coming together. An alternative outcome is that the agency and actions of the individuals over time become less important, as the capacity of the relationship, as a mutually-created dynamo, starts to become the more significant driving force.

For the sake of clarity, however, I have decided to use perhaps the most prominent entity perspective, Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX), as my principal theoretical lens. This is due to LMX providing the most established and proven model for understanding how working relationships develop within the framework of relational leadership.

3.4 Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX).

LMX first emerged in the 1970s from an attempt to view leadership from a multi-level perspective instead of one focusing almost exclusively on the qualities of the leader (such as trait and behavioural approaches). LMX acknowledges that few leaders will have a uniform way of dealing with other employees within an

organisation: rather, their leadership exists within a dyad co-created with the subordinate or 'follower'.

It also developed from role theory (Kahn et al, 1964), which stated that members of an organisation accomplish their work through roles – defined as a set of activities or behaviours – and that each, in turn, exchanges their role expectations with others. Role 'holders' and 'receivers' respond to those expectations 'either through performance of role behaviours or through negotiating a different set of role expectations' (Nahrgang & Seo, 2015). This is redolent of Graen et al's (1973) study of assimilation processes in organisations, whereby new postholders have to formulate and adapt their own roles within an organisation, particularly as to how they relate to others (and their roles).

Initially termed Vertical Dyad Linkage, LMX has progressed over time into 'a prescription for generating more effective leadership through the development and maintenance of mature leadership relationships' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 220). It does this through consideration of individuals and groups beyond the leader, appreciating that leadership develops not just through the attributes and actions of the leader but through the qualities and reactions of the led. In turn, these interactions contribute additionally to the development of the relationship, thus providing three key domains to its functioning and evolution: the leader, the follower and the relationship. A 'multiple domain perspective' (as suggested by Rousseau (1985) and Klein et al (1994)) provides a more rounded view of each of the individual domains and a more accurate assessment of the quality of leadership that emerges from the relationship.

3.4.1 The domains of leadership.

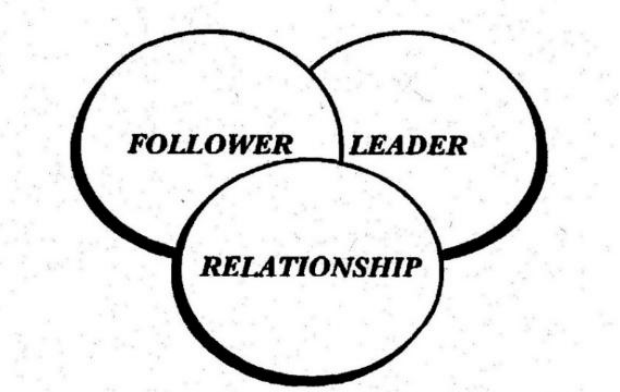

Figure 3.2: The domains of leadership (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 221).

Figure 3.2 illustrates the three relationship domains. Within the 'leader domain', one considers the qualities and characteristics that a leader possesses that are most likely to deliver desired outcomes. Natural examples are their individual traits, behaviours, attitudes, conduct and personality. Analysis within this domain therefore examines how these variables interact with the others within the relationship. Likewise, the 'follower domain' examines similar behaviours of the follower to determine how far they promote effective leadership. In turn, the focus moves to the relationship between leader and follower to highlight identifying characteristics of dyadic relationships – such as trust, respect and mutual obligation – and to evaluate reciprocal influence between leaders and followers in order to research how effective leaderships can be developed and maintained (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Ultimately, this relationship develops a dynamic of its own, as each, in turn, can impact on the others, developing the relationship further.

However, one could look at the three domains in reverse. In other words, the relationship exists because the organisation expects it to. In this instance, the headteacher-CoG relationship exists because of historical, legislative and cultural demands and expectations, with the postholders adopting the leader/follower mantle as required. An additional complexity is supplied to the dyad by the lack of

clarity as to whom is the leader/follower at any one time and in what context that might be.

3.4.2 The evolution of Leader-Member Exchange Theory.

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) divide the development of LMX into four stages. The impetus for the initial research (Dansereau et al, 1975) came from a belief that leaders do not employ a uniform leadership style with all their direct reports but rather develop 'differentiated relationships' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 225): the focus was on why, what and how. The research revealed that leaders' relationships with their direct reports was not uniform: some reported a high degree of trust and mutual respect, others felt the opposite. The conclusion initially was that this was largely driven by resources: the more time the leader could devote to the employee (or follower), the more likely the relationship would exhibit qualities such as trust and respect. At this time, the research did not look much beyond the leader's behaviour, the key variable being how separate followers reacted to that behaviour.

As more researchers sought to explore these relationships, a second stage emerged, which looked beyond just the leader's behaviour to consider other variables at work in the relationship. This split into two elements. One was an examination of the other dynamics within the relationship, such as the frequency of communication, the characteristics of followers in high-quality relationships and features of a differentiated relationship. The other addressed how variables within organisations, such as expectations of performance, job satisfaction and career progression, affected the relationship. This inevitably enriched the analysis of dyads through appreciating the forces at work both within and outside the relationship that were provoking interaction and change.

The third stage softened the division between 'superiors' and 'subordinates' to a view of the relationship as more of a partnership in which the LMX process 'may

be perceived as more equitable' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and where the analysis became less descriptive about the nature of such relationships but instead prescriptive about how such relationships could potentially result in improved leadership and organisational capability. Some key studies (Graen et all, 1982; Scandura and Graen, 1984; Graen et al, 1986) took it upon themselves to present an overarching framework as to how all relationships could develop in such a way as to secure high performance. These ultimately led a model (Figure 3.3), which outlines a 'life cycle of leadership relationship maturity' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995).

More recent research has extended the focus on other potential dyads – such as Member-Member Exchange (MMX), Co-worker-Member Exchange (CMX) and Team-Member Exchange (TMX) (Keup et al, 2004) – where there is less of a hierarchical divide between the two participants. Each examines how the forming of mutually dependent relationships is instrumental to successful performance in the workplace. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) recognise that there are a large range of variables to consider and that not all relationships need be of a high quality if the work/tasks involved do not require a high level of mutual dependency. An inference that can be drawn, however, is that the higher the levels of trust required in a relationship, the greater the degree of focus there needs to be on the construction and development of the relationship. The headteacher-CoG relationship displays aspects of both LMX and MMX, as both roles have leader and follower characteristics, as well as moments of superiority and equality.

There is a hierarchical difference between the roles of headteacher and CoG but this is complex. In simple terms, the CoG chairs the board which has overall responsibility for the school. As well as being the ultimate sign-off to all school actions and policies, they have the ability to appoint and dismiss the headteacher. From that perspective, the CoG can be perceived as the leader within the dyad. However, the headteacher is the leading professional within the school and has arguably greater knowledge and capacity to exercise leadership. They may therefore be regarded as the *de facto* leader. In reality, the *potential* is there for

both the headteacher and CoG to act as leader *and* follower. In some relationships, it may be obvious which role is adopted; in others, the roles may be shared, alternated or become modified over time.

More recent LMX studies have sought to apply its concepts – most particularly how LMX can lead to high-quality relationships based on mutual trust and respect – to a wider set of concerns, such as the induction of new employees (Zhou & Wang, 2015), reducing job stress (Sonnentag & Pundt, 2015) and the role that emotions play in LMX relationships (Tse et al, 2015).

The last of these is particularly relevant to this study, given the personal and professional boundaries of the 'critical friend' concept, in that it highlights the positive impact of emotional responses within relationships. For example, Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzo, 1996) can be used as a framework for leadership researchers to understand the emotional experiences and subsequent expressions and behaviours that occur within emotionally-charged events, such as appraisal or performance management. Likewise, Emotional Contagion Theory (ECT) (Hatfield et al, 1994) argues that individuals can 'catch' the emotions of others consciously or unconsciously, with moods being spread vicariously or mimicked out of compliance.

The LMX model is also of use when considering where relational leadership can be placed on the continuum of transactional and transformational leadership. Within the most basic forms of LMX, aspects of transactional leadership are evident, where there is an exchange of material or social benefit, largely on a self-interested basis. As LMX relationships become more developed, the remit of the relationship moves beyond the needs of the dyad to become more broadly focused, taking into account the wider demands of the organisation. In such a way, it takes on the vestiges of transformational leadership, as the relationship becomes something of a dynamo for change and effective leadership beyond its confines.

3.4.3 Graen and Uhl Bien's life cycle of leadership making.

Graen and Uhl Bien's (1995) life cycle of leadership making (Figure 3.3) begins with a 'stranger' phase, in which participants' exchanges are 'purely contractual': 'leaders provide followers only with what they need to perform, and followers behave only as required and do only their prescribed job' (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995: 230). Green and Uhl-Bien (1995) refer to this as a 'cash and carry' phase, where interactions are largely transactional, in which one party directs (usually the leader) and the other reacts. An improved working relationship can in turn develop through an 'offer' of a more sophisticated way of working or a higher level of interaction. This is referred to as the 'acquaintance' stage, marked also by increased social exchanges between the participants, with not all of them being contractual. More information and resources are shared, both on a personal and work level, and there is an increasing level of reciprocity. However, there is a limit to these exchanges and the relationship is still at 'a testing stage' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 230). When these relationships establish themselves further, they can be classified as 'mature partnership' exchanges:

> 'At this point, exchanges between the members are highly developed: they are exchanges 'in kind' and may have a long time span of reciprocation. The individuals can count on each other for loyalty and support. Moreover, the exchanges are not only behavioural but also emotional – mutual respect, trust, and obligation grow throughout the process. It is at this stage that the degree of incremental influence and, hence, leadership between the members is extremely high.'
>
> (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 230)

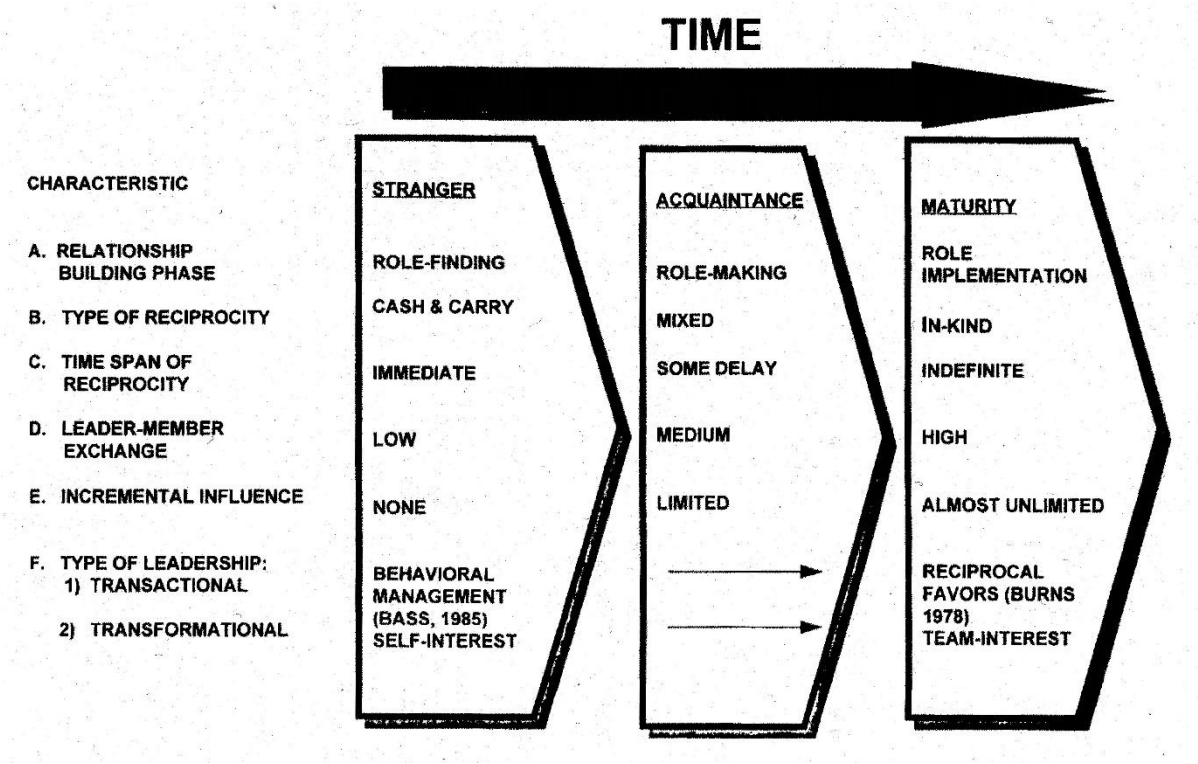

Figure 3.3: Life cycle of leadership making (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 231).

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) stress that several variables exist within the 'life cycle', not least time, with some dyads never progressing beyond the stranger stage. LMX research characterises these as lower-quality LMX relationships, not dissimilar to models of transactional leadership (such as Bass, 1985), in that contact between leader and follower exists due to the requirements of the leader and the obligations of the follower. It is a relationship based around the self-interest of the participants rather than one considering the wider goals or needs of the organisation (or, indeed, the relationship). Intermediate LMX quality dyads possess more effective leadership processes but these are not always consistently in evidence or fully developed. This acquaintance stage, however, is a critical point for the leadership development process as, if the pace of development slows, the relationship can then revert to the stranger phase. Those relationships which do make it to the 'partnership' phase are marked by a high degree of mutual respect, trust and obligation. Leaders can rely on followers for their commitment and support, even if the follower is not directly rewarded for it. Likewise, followers are

able to rely on leaders for additional encouragement and potential career enhancement.

> 'It is this mutual trust, respect, and obligation towards each which empowers and motivates both to expand beyond the formalized work contract and formalized work roles: to grow out of their prescribed jobs and develop a partnership based on mutual reciprocal influence.'
>
> (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 232)

The 'maturity' phase also features a relaxation in the structure and remit of the relationship. Formality and hierarchy may no longer be prioritised and 'the relationship becomes one more like peers than superior-subordinate' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 233) Participants look beyond their narrow self-interest and consider in greater depth the wider needs they have of each other and the organisation.

The crucial point is that the process of making more effective relationships leads to the making of more effective leadership outcomes, as partners within the dyad not only exert greater influence over each other but also effectively pool their abilities, resources and capacity to offer support for the other to benefit from. In turn, high-quality relationships act not only as models for others in the organisation to replicate but also as a method of delivery, as participants adopt a similar approach to all those with whom they interact. A concern, however, could be that such high-quality relationships could become too 'cosy' and 'cliquey' and to the detriment of alternative relationships with other governors and school leaders.

LMX has not been without its critics and part of this relates to the method of measuring the 'success' of such relationships. Graen and Uhl Bien's (1995) seven-item framework (LMX7) has been criticised for what some have regarded as an unscientific methodology. Using LMX7 would certainly cause dilemmas within a study such as this: first, my research questions have been constructed in such a way as to avoid specific 'value' judgements, with the onus being on the researcher and not the participant to adjudge the 'success' of the relationship or otherwise;

second, the headteacher-CoG relationship is often a delicate one, requiring both tact and discretion in the way it is conducted and discussed with others and so requiring the participants to arrive at a particular judgement could undermine their confidence in the purpose and methodology of the research; and third, phenomenological studies seek to address the fullness and complexity of the lived experience and, due to the multifarious elements of the headteacher-CoG relationship, it is only to be expected that the views of the participants may be subtle and highly nuanced. As with other aspects of LMX, the research has therefore been informed by the framework rather than shaped by it.

3.5 Phenomenology.

There were several reasons for adopting a phenomenological research approach within this study. The headteacher-CoG relationship can be regarded as a 'phenomenon', in that it is a situation or circumstance (or 'an object of human experience' as termed by van Manen (1990: 177)) that can only properly be understood by researching first-person experiences of being within that phenomenon. There is an irony here: on the one hand, many would presume (including my pre-headteacher self) that a relationship such as this is largely self-explanatory, that why and how it exists is fairly obvious; on the other, so little has been written about it, and the relationship is so little discussed, that it is difficult to read or find out about what the relationship is or how it has been experienced by others. This is why the relationship is appropriate for investigation phenomenologically given that such research 'is to explore and uncover understandings about a phenomenon that has been taken for granted in our everyday lived experiences' (Giles, 2019: 45).

The focus of the study is the relationship itself, not the qualities or the characters of the people involved:

> 'The relationship is not the one person or the other; rather, the relationship and its life exist in the space between. Thought in this way, the moral and ethical responsibility for the nature of a particular relationship belongs to all those involved in the relationship. The individuals all influence the nature of a particular relationship, albeit within an array of power relations.'
>
> (Giles, 2019: 47)

It is not my overriding intent, via the sampling for example, to construct a hypothesis focusing on the characteristics of the participants (their age or background for example) or the type of school to which they belong. These are of ancillary interest: I suspect that they might have some significance but it is not anticipated that they will determine the research's principal conclusions. Husserl, regarded as the founder of phenomenology, called it 'the science of the essence of consciousness' (Husserl, [1913] 1982: 33): what matters is what is directly sensed and experienced with regard to the object, not the possession or expression of any pre-conceived concepts or externally-derived knowledge. Husserl maintained that 'what appears is the starting point: we should begin our investigation with what is experienced … any assumptions which would tend to distract the researcher from a focus on the experience must be set aside' (Ashworth, 2015). What matters, therefore, is the experience and this depends more on the innermost qualities of the individuals involved and less on their external characteristics.

A phenomenological approach suits the data collection method and vice-versa. Considering the status and availability of the participants, I am conscious that some research methods may be unsuitable or unlikely to succeed. Quantitative methods, such as an online survey, would provide me with data from individual headteachers and CoGs, rather than both participants within a relationship. Using quantitative methods within one school could be of use but, again, I would be reliant on full and accurate responses from the participants, who may be less comfortable to commit in writing what they might be prepared to say in person. Semi-structured interviews suit the participants best, especially if they have trust in the background and status of the researcher, and it is this method that is recommended by phenomenological researchers, such as van Manen (1990).

I wish for my own positionality with the research to be valuable and not a hindrance. I have already outlined in Chapter 1 how I experienced the headteacher-CoG relationship and acknowledge that my positionality within the research could be regarded as problematic. Although there is a divergence of opinion, phenomenology appreciates that divesting oneself of prior knowledge or judgement is never easy and, within the methodology, some researchers regard it as advantageous to have a degree of insider knowledge, as long as it is recognised and utilised appropriately.

3.5.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

The specific phenomenological method used within the study is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (or IPA), as developed by Smith (1996). In line with other phenomenological approaches, it focuses on a detailed examination of the participants' lived experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception of an object or event, as opposed to an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

However, IPA has several specific characteristics. Some branches of phenomenology, such as transcendental or psychological phenomenology, view it as important that, as far as possible, the researcher's own prior conceptions regarding the object or phenomenon are understood and 'bracketed' or separated away from the research. As a result, when assessing the data, the researcher's influence on the outcomes is minimised and 'everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time' (Moustakas, 1994: 34). In contrast, in hermeneutic phenomenology, as originated by Heidegger ([1927] 1962), the research exercise is a dynamic process, with an active role for the researcher in that process. In other words, rather than viewing the researcher's own conceptions of the phenomenon as an obstacle to overcome, 'these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretive enquiry' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 26) IPA is an extension of hermeneutic phenomenology,

in that it sets out a two-stage interpretation, or a double hermeneutic, process: 'the participants are trying to make sense of their world [and] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 26).

'IPA combines an empathetic hermeneutics with a questioning hermeneutics' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 26). The attraction of using IPA within this study is that I am able to make use of my own understanding of the relationship, and my knowledge of school leadership more generally, to position myself within the research. IPA accepts that this may lead one to empathise with the participants but views this as advantageous because, in doing so, I am able to 'walk in their shoes' and gain a closer understanding of their experience; likewise, an insider perspective also affords me the opportunity to be less naïve about and perhaps more critical of the participants than I otherwise might be. 'Allowing for both aspects in the inquiry is likely to lead to a richer analysis and to do greater justice to the totality of the person, 'warts and all'' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 26). IPA also pays specific attention to the 'cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 26). Given the qualities within the headteacher-CoG relationship – secrecy and complexity, the power differentials, how each participant regards the other – it will be hugely beneficial to look beyond the spoken word to consider the broader elements of communication within the research.

IPA is interested in the cognitive processes of the participants: in other words, how, as well as what, they think. However, unlike mainstream psychology research, IPA uses in-depth qualitative, rather than quantitative, research. Quantitative methods could deliver possibly a broader perspective of headteacher-CoG relationship but it is doubtful that it would be as a deep or, indeed, as accurate, as a qualitative approach. IPA is also idiographic, in that it avoids making universal claims about research findings. As its intention is to look at how particular people have experienced particular events, the preference is to make

more limited general claims. An IPA study will, therefore, 'usually present its results as a set of convergences and divergences within the accounts of the participants' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 27).

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research design.

Hibberts and Johnson (2012) state that the three major research methods in educational leadership and management are quantitative, qualitative and mixed. Initially, a mixed methods approach was considered, as this would, in theory, evidence examples of the headteacher-CoG relationship in a wide range of settings. At its best, a mixed approach enables researchers to develop a comprehensive view of the 'bigger picture' and construct 'meta-inferences' (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012: 127). However, a quantitative approach was rejected, as investigating the subtleties and complexities of the headteacher-CoG relationship through, for example, an online survey, was considered unlikely to be successful: the questions asked were likely to be oversimplistic or too verbose, the target population too busy or unwilling to take time to complete it and the results incomplete and unworthy of comparison.

According to Ritchie (2003: 32), 'there are many occasions when a qualitative approach will be the *only* approach needed to address a research question'. She suggests that the objective of the research will determine whether this is the case, arising when the study holds the following features: ill-defined/not well understood; deeply-rooted; complex; specialist; delicate or intangible; sensitive (Ritchie, 2003).

A qualitative methodology is also appropriate for studies where data will be 'generated' by the research (as opposed to that which already exists). 'Generated data gives insight into people's own perspectives and interpretations of their own behaviours – and, most crucially, an understanding of the meaning that they attach to them' (Ritchie, 2003: 36). This is exactly what a phenomenological researcher is looking to uncover: the beliefs, motivations, actions and reactions which have hitherto been hidden or unacknowledged.

The decision to use a qualitative approach was also made in the light of my ontological and epistemological assumptions about the research. My own ontological position is similar to what Hammersley (1992) describes as 'subtle realism', later developed by Snape and Spencer (2003). This accepts that the social world does exist independently of individual subjective understanding but that it is only accessible via the respondents' interpretations (which may then, in turn, be interpreted by the researcher). Differences between research participants' interpretations are not to be feared: indeed, they are inevitable given each participant's different vantage points. Importantly, though, this does not negate the existence of an external reality, as, within this ontology, this is accepted to be diverse and multifaceted and it is this very diversity that adds richness to our understanding of the way the reality is experienced.

My epistemological position is interpretivist and pragmatic. Interpretivism seeks to understand participants' perspectives within the context of their lives and circumstances. This can be achieved through acquiring as much detailed information from them, which, alongside our own interpretation of the data, can enable us to develop deeper insights into their reality through synthesising, interlocking and comparing the accounts of a number of participants. My position is pragmatic because the research is not designed to align with any fixed philosophical agenda or predetermined outcome. Drawing on Biesta's view, the value of research such as this lies not in fitting predefined categories but in responding to what is educationally meaningful in context. This allows the inquiry to remain open to complexity, ambiguity and the ethical dimensions of practice (Biesta, 2007). The research method and form of analysis are therefore chosen so as to provide an accurate reflection of the data collected in order to develop an appropriate and meaningful interpretation of the phenomenon.

The research was carried out through individual interviews with headteachers and CoGs across eight schools, which reflected a careful consideration of scope, balance and practicality. A sample of eight allowed for a diverse mix of participants in terms of background, experience and institutional type, offering a

meaningful cross-section without becoming unwieldy. The figure was also useful from a structural standpoint: it permitted an equal split between state-funded and independent schools, ensuring that neither sector dominated the findings and that comparisons could be more readily drawn. As Cohen et al (2018) note, qualitative research benefits from carefully bounded samples that allow for rich, context-sensitive analysis. Similarly, Silverman (2013) emphasises that depth and manageability in qualitative interviewing are often more valuable than quantity alone. In this way, the design of the research supported a balanced and manageable inquiry into the dynamics of the headteacher-CoG relationship.

4.2 Research questions.

The research questions, which are listed at the end of this section, were formulated at an early stage of the study, prior to the adoption of LMX and before phenomenology was selected as the guiding research approach. Their development was therefore shaped primarily by my prior professional experience and initial reading, rather than by a formal theoretical framework. The intention was to create a structure that would allow for meaningful exploration of the relationship under investigation, whilst remaining open to novel and unpredictable results during the research process.

Research Question 1 was intended to explore prior knowledge of the relationship. It served as a natural entry point, offering a way to establish context and introduce the topic in a grounded and accessible manner. The question was designed to open up space for reflection and to set a tone that encouraged openness and depth.

Based on my experience, I observed that the appointment process often played a critical role in shaping how the relationship developed over time. This insight informed Research Question 2, which was included out of a belief that the appointment process could have lasting effects on the nature of the relationship.

Initial observations indicated that the structures and choices involved in the appointment stage might subtly influence expectations, roles, and dynamics: impacts that are not always immediately visible but may prove ultimately significant.

Research Question 3 focused on how the relationship developed over time. It was structured to examine practical and interpersonal aspects such as meeting formats, trust and the negotiation of boundaries. Communication was positioned as a central theme, not only as a functional element but also as a way of accessing broader relational dynamics. The question was also intended to allow for the emergence of more personal insights, recognising that such reflections might offer a deeper understanding of how the relationship was experienced and sustained.

Research Question 4 centred on the term 'critical friend'. Although this phrase has become less common in governance literature, it was retained for its ability to capture the dual roles of support and challenge. The question was designed to prompt immediate engagement with these ideas and to explore the emotional and professional tensions they might reveal. It also provided a natural continuation from the themes of communication and boundaries explored in the previous question.

Research Question 5 addressed the distinction between strategic and operational roles. It was included to examine how this boundary was understood and navigated in practice. The question was based on the assumption that clarity in this area was essential for effective leadership and governance. It also opened up the possibility of exploring the wider impact of the relationship, particularly in terms of how it influenced leadership beyond the immediate dyad.

The research questions adopted for the data collection were, therefore, as follows:

Research Question 1	To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-CoG relationship?
Research Question 2	How far is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment and induction process?
Research Question 3	Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?
Research Question 4	How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs in the context of CoGs supporting and challenging the headteacher?
Research Question 5	How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?

4.3 Selection of participants.

Recruiting participants for the research was recognised as a potential stumbling block early in the process. Several concerns were initially identified: whether headteachers/CoGs would be prepared to discuss their relationship, even with reassurances about confidentiality; how far participants would be prepared to trust me and respond to my questions honestly and candidly; how I could create a sample of relationships which reflected the diversity of the potential schools and participants.

One of the early decisions faced with regard to sampling was whether to focus on headteachers and CoGs solely from the independent sector or from state-funded schools or to include relationships from both. Given my career to date had almost been exclusively within the independent sector, including as a headteacher, it seemed sensible for me to include these within the sample, as I knew the sector well. This would aid the research logistically, as well as make my judgements more insightful. It is also the case that researchers have found it difficult to enlist English independent school personnel to participate in research and so my 'insider' status in this regard could confer on this study a degree of originality. However, I

did not want the study to focus solely on the independent sector, as it could marginalise my findings and recommendations if it was perceived as irrelevant to schools outside the sector. I therefore decided to split the sample equally between independent and state-funded schools. This would grant the study relevance to both sectors and also enable some interesting comparisons between the two. As my focus in the study was on the headteacher-CoG relationship, as opposed to the schools more generally, I did not expect the differences to be significant, certainly not overwhelmingly, but believed it was likely that structural and cultural factors could influence how it was formed and conducted. Interestingly, the independent/state sampling attracted considerable interest from those enquiring about the research, whereas my suspicion from the beginning was that the importance of this could be overplayed in comparison to other sampling criteria.

Several criteria were drawn up as to the basis on which to select and invite participants. The first of these was the length of tenure of the headteacher. This was reasonably straightforward to determine given information available on the internet in local press announcements and inspection reports. As the research was focused in part on how the relationship developed over time, it was important that both new and longstanding relationships were included within the sample. The characteristics of the headteacher – and, if available, the CoG – were also included as criteria, as it was important that there was some balance in representation regarding gender, race and age. Although it was unlikely that the sample would be entirely representative, it was important that this was factored into selection decisions. More minor considerations were the size and geographical location of the school and, with the state-funded schools, their current organisational status (LA maintained or in a MAT, for example).

Due to the connections I had made during my time within the independent sector, I had already drawn up a list of potential participants for that part of the research. These were headteachers I had either met previously at conferences or professional development courses, who fitted the principal criteria. For the state-funded headteachers, I intended to rely on approaches via email, again seeking to

reflect the agreed criteria. The headteachers were to be contacted first, as I believed the CoGs would most likely follow the lead of their headteachers and only participate if the headteacher wished to.

All of the independent school headteachers I approached agreed to participate and, in turn, gained the consent of their CoG. The 'cold' approach was unsuccessful in bringing forward any headteachers from the state-funded sector, even when followed up through further communication. This was perhaps understandable given the busy schedule of the headteachers, the impersonal approach and the likely concern of how and to what end the research would be undertaken. It was clear that personal recommendation was going to be crucial if I was going to secure the rest of the sample.

To that end, I contacted former colleagues who had contacts who might be able to assist and I was also aided by other professional acquaintances and my supervisors. This route proved successful and, indeed, was met with positive enthusiasm by some of those invited. As part of this process, I was also able to utilise the secondary criteria to ensure that the sample had a range and a degree of diversity.

Table 4.1 shows the characteristics of the schools where the eight relationships were based.

Relationship	Nature	Area	Size Range	Age	Gender	Day/ Boarding
A	Independent school with charitable status	East	500-1000	4-18	Girls	Day
B	Independent school with charitable status	South-East	1000-1500	11-18	Boys	Day & Boarding
C	Independent school with charitable status	South-West	1000-1500	11-18	Co-ed	Day

D	Independent school with charitable status	North	500-1000	11-18	Co-ed	Day & Boarding
E	State-funded academy within a MAT	East Midlands	1000-1500	11-19	Co-ed	Day
F	State-funded academy within a single academy trust	South-East	1500-2000	11-18	Co-ed	Day
G	State-funded academy within a MAT	East	1000-1500	11-16	Co-ed	Day
H	State-funded local authority maintained comprehensive	South-East	500-1000	11-18	Co-ed	Day

Table 4.1: Key characteristics of schools at which Relationships A to H are based.

Table 4.2 details, in summary form, the principal characteristics of the individuals in Relationships A to H. The order relates to the sequence in which the interviews were conducted. The independent school headteachers and CoGs were interviewed first because they were recruited first. The fact they were clustered together meant that the research formed a symmetry which proved helpful when later analysing the data.

Relationship	Participant	Gender	Age	First Time in Post	Years in Post
A	**Head**	Female	45-54	✓	16
	CoG	Male	65+	✓	3
B	**Head**	Male	45-54	✗	7
	CoG	Male	55-64	✓	6
C	**Head**	Male	45-54	✓	5
	CoG	Male	55-64	✓	7
D	**Head**	Male	55-64	✗	7
	CoG	Male	65+	✓	2

E	**Head**	Female	35-44	✗	3
	CoG	Male	55-64	✓	2
F	**Head**	Male	45-54	✗	3
	CoG	Male	45-54	✗	3
G	**Head**	Male	35-44	✓	5
	CoG	Female	65+	✗	7
H	**Head**	Male	35-44	✓	2
	CoG	Male	45-54	✓	2

Table 4.2: Summary of participant characteristics within Relationships A to H.

Table 4.3 are pen portraits explaining the background and experience of the headteachers and CoGs in each relationship. The details here demonstrate the range and diversity of the sample, certainly in terms of their background and experience. It was never the intention to claim that the sample was somehow representative of the population but I was conscious throughout of the need for there to be female and non-white headteachers and CoGs within the sample and this was achieved.

Within a phenomenological study, it is desirable for research participants to be interviewed on more than one occasion, so as to reduce the chance that their contributions will be skewed by how they happen to be feeling at that particular moment. Given the geographical spread of the participants, and the fact that they had busy and demanding schedules, I knew this would not be possible. However, I felt this was mitigated by two factors: first, given their professional backgrounds, the participants were highly thoughtful and reflective about their answers; second, each of them had considerable prior professional experience, meaning that they were able to place their answers in context. The information they had been sent in advance also meant they were prepared for the interview and so their responses were more considered. What I had not anticipated about the sample was that many of them had experienced several headteacher-CoG relationships, some as

many as five or six. This meant that, although the study only extended to eight relationships, reference was made to more than a dozen others, enriching the participants' perspectives and providing something of a longitudinal angle to some of their accounts.

Relationship	Background and Context
A	School A was a medium-sized independent 3-18 Roman Catholic girls' school in a city in the East of England. Headteacher A was in her sixteenth year as headteacher, having been appointed in her late thirties. This was her first headship. CoG A was a retired independent school headteacher and an experienced school governor, having been on the board of as many as fifteen schools. This was his first time as CoG and he had been in post for three years, after one year as a governor at the school. He was Headteacher A's fifth CoG during her time as headteacher.
B	School B was a large independent 11-18 boys' day and boarding school in a town in the South-East England. Headteacher B was in his fifteenth year as headteacher and in his early fifties. This was his second headship, having been headteacher of another independent school for eight years, prior to starting at School B seven years previously. CoG B was retired, having been a senior consultant within a large English teaching hospital. He was a former pupil of School B and joined the board when, nearing retirement, he moved back to the area. He became CoG after four years as a governor and was in his sixth year as CoG. He was Headteacher B's second CoG at the school and his fourth CoG as a headteacher.
C	School C is a large 11-18 co-educational independent school in a city in the South-West England. Headteacher C was in his fifth year as headteacher and in his early forties. This was his first headship. CoG C worked in finance and was a former pupil of School C. He joined the board on moving back to the area and became CoG after five years as a governor. He was in his seventh year as CoG, having been in post when Headteacher C was appointed.
D	School D was a medium-sized co-educational independent day and boarding school in a city in the North of England. Headteacher D was in his seventh year as headteacher and in his mid-fifties. He was interviewed at the start of his final term prior to retirement. This was his second headship, having been headteacher of another independent school for nearly twelve years. CoG D was retired, having served in a range of posts in the international charitable sector. He was a former pupil of School D. He became CoG after 'several years' as a governor and was nearing the end of his second year as CoG. He lived over 200 miles away from School D. He was Headteacher D's third CoG at the school and his seventh CoG as a headteacher.
E	School E was a medium-sized state-funded secondary 11-16 academy in a city in the East Midlands of England. It was founded in 2018 and, in 2021, moved into new, purpose-built premises. It was part of a

	MAT but was the only secondary school within it. Headteacher E was in her third year as headteacher and was in her early forties. This was her second headship, having, for six years, been the headteacher at a different school. CoG E was a retired teacher, having served in a variety of leadership posts, including as an acting secondary school headteacher. He was in his second year as CoG, having been a governor for only a few months beforehand. He was Headteacher E's second CoG at the school and her fourth CoG as a headteacher.
F	School F was a large state-funded co-educational 11-18 secondary school with academy status in a town in the South-East of England. It was not currently part of a MAT. Headteacher F was in his thirteenth year as a headteacher and in his early fifties. This was his second headship, having been headteacher of a similar school for ten years, prior to starting at School F three years beforehand. CoG F was the CEO of a local MAT, after a career as a headteacher and a school improvement consultant for the local authority. He was a former pupil of School F and his two children attended the school. He became CoG at School F after four years as a governor and was in his third year as CoG. He was Headteacher F 's second CoG at the school and his sixth CoG as a headteacher.
G	School G was a large state-funded 11-16 co-educational academy, part of a MAT and set in a village location in the East of England. Headteacher G was in his fifth year as headteacher and is in his early forties. This was his first headship, having been Assistant Head and then Deputy Head at School G. CoG G had in the past been a teacher but was now retired. She had been a governor at School G for thirty years and been CoG for the previous seven years, having also been CoG between 2000 and 2005. She had been a governor at a local primary school for thirty-seven years, including a period as CoG. She was therefore Headteacher G's first and only CoG at the school; he was the fifth headteacher at School G during her time as a governor.
H	School H was a large state-funded local authority maintained co-educational comprehensive school in a large town in the South-East of England. Headteacher H was in his second year as headteacher and in his early forties. This was his first headship, having previously been a leadership advisor with the local authority. CoG B was a local businessman, who became a governor six years beforehand, having assisted School H with careers advice. He became CoG at the same time as Headteacher H took up his appointment. School H had recently undergone a complete rebuilding project on the same site as the old school.

Table 4.3: Pen portraits of participants within Relationships A to H.

4.4 Interviews.

In-depth interviews have long been a customary method for qualitative researchers. However, given their different philosophical traditions, it is not perhaps surprising that there are differences of opinion about the purpose of conducting such interviews. Kvale (1996) sees two perspectives: one, summarised as the 'miner metaphor', regards knowledge as a 'given', something pre-existing that needs to be extracted by the interviewer; the other, termed the 'traveller metaphor', regards the interviewer as an explorer, able to discover new information and ideas and approaches, sometimes in alliance with the interviewee, through the interview process. The first of these demands that interviews are relatively structured, with a research logic similar to questionnaires in order to obtain similar and comparable outcomes. Brinkmann and Vale (2018: 579) call them 'passive recordings of people's opinions and attitudes'. In the second, in relatively unstructured interviews, it is the interviewer who becomes largely passive, as the interviewee is given the time and space to tell their story.

This research, conducted through semi-structured interviews, encompasses both approaches. Structure in an interview is important in any context but was particularly so in this instance. Headteachers and CoGs have considerable experience and expertise to draw upon and are thus able to provide significant insight the relationship. For both information and comparison purposes, it was important that they responded to specific questions in a logical format. They are also busy people and, therefore, it was wise to reassure them that the research was relevant to them and that their time would be well spent. Likewise, for the credibility of the research, and myself as a researcher, I needed to convey in advance that I had researched and reflected about the key issues at stake and had formulated an interview schedule which reflected this.

I could not allow the interviews to be over-formal, however, as there needed to be scope for flexibility. As it turned out, this was less important when it came to the order that the individual questions were asked, as this was largely adhered to, but

more so in relation to the depth of participants' responses. This was certainly the case when they were able to share considerable prior experience: exploring this afforded me the opportunity to probe about how this affected their approach to their current relationship. Likewise, it became clear during the process that there were aspects of the relationship that the participants had not necessarily considered before, certainly not in any depth. The semi-structured approach thus gave considerable scope between questions for these to be examined. Flexibility also afforded me a chance to interact more with participants and utilise my own experiences to elucidate responses or request further clarification.

The less structured the interview, the more is required of the skills of the researcher to navigate the questioning successfully. Legard et al (2003) explain how researchers are themselves 'research instruments' (Legard et al, 2003: 142), requiring specific skills and qualities, such as the ability to listen and digest participants' answers, a clear and logical mind and an acute sense of curiosity. My own professional background was crucial, as this had afforded me both an ability to listen to others but also a capacity to intervene and probe when necessary.

The way I prepared for each interview was shaped by the principles of interpretivist phenomenology, and IPA in particular, where the focus is on understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. This meant that developing the research questions and deciding how best to structure the interviews were not just technical steps but part of a broader effort to create space for open and expansive dialogue. The aim was to support a conversation that could move beyond surface-level responses and allow for deeper reflection. Ahead of each interview, I took time to learn what I could about the school and the individuals involved. This included looking at school websites and, where available, professional profiles on platforms like LinkedIn. This background research was not about forming conclusions in advance but about arriving with enough context to engage meaningfully. It helped me approach each conversation with a sense of the setting, while remaining open to the unique ways in which each person might describe and interpret their experience.

Thompson (2000) similarly stresses that in-depth interviewing requires interest in and respect for people as individuals and Patton (2002) states the importance of curiosity, as the researcher needs to understand and reflect not just on *what* is being said but *how* and *why*. My professional experience, in this regard, meant that I was highly attuned to the language, views and experiences of the participants, which granted me even greater capacity to be curious and, at times, empathetic, where empathy was able to induce a more profound response.

It has already been said how my background engendered trust when it came to the willingness of participants to take part in the research. It also proved valuable during the interviews. Establishing rapport was aided by a shared identity and experience – participants sometimes made reference to this – as was credibility. Humour, as engendered through mutual understanding or recognition of a common experience, also helped on occasion. I also believe that greater maturity meant that I was unfazed by last-minute changes to the arrangements or interruptions during the interview. This meant that I could remain calm and maintain my concentration.

The interviews took place between February and July 2023. The format of each was the same. They were all conducted at the participants' schools, apart from one (CoG D), which had to be done online due to him living over two hundred miles from the school. They each lasted between 60 and 75 minutes, with the headteacher being interviewed first, followed by the CoG. I adopted this pattern deliberately, so that the nature of each relationship would be revealed in the same manner, to aid both comparison and consistency. I avoided drawing the participants' attention to time throughout the interview, to avoid appearing rude and so as to avoid them unnecessarily rushing or prematurely ending responses. For that reason, I wore a watch so that I could discretely keep an eye on time, appreciating that I had to adhere to the pre-agreed schedule.

Arrangements for the interview were, in all but one instance, organised in conjunction with the headteacher's PA: with one, I had to liaise between the

headteacher and the CoG to arrive at a suitable date and time for the interviews, which, in itself, was revealing. It helped that I made myself as available as possible to fit in with their schedules, rearranging where necessary due to last-minute clashes, such as strike days. The venue for the interviews was usually the headteacher's office and a meeting room nearby. In two instances, this was not possible and the headteacher kindly vacated their office to permit the CoG to be interviewed, which was remarkable and indicative of the trust and respect engendered within the process.

Small details are also important, especially when interviewing high-status individuals, as, to create an atmosphere of confidence and respect, it was vital that expectation matched reality: I ensured that I arrived at each school with plenty of time in case of any delay; I wore a suit and placed my question sheets (attached to a clipboard) in a briefcase to convey a sense of formality and seriousness of purpose; likewise, I remained conscious of my body language throughout and rejected offers of coffee or refreshment, so as to remain focused. I began each interview thanking the participants profusely for their participation. Legard et al (2003) state how crucial the first few minutes of each meeting can be for establishing the relationship between researcher and participant. I therefore sought to put the participant at their ease through a brief discussion about aspects of the school or my journey prior before moving as speedily as possible to a reiteration of the nature and purpose of the research. My initial invitation to participants [Appendix B] had already explained this in some detail and this had been followed-up, in even more detail, with an information sheet [Appendix C]. I had also sent them the questions beforehand (and separately, as I had ensured I obtained individual email addresses as part of the scheduling process). I did this to reassure them that the interview was not going to be contentious or adversarial and to give them some time to prepare and think over their answers in advance. Indeed, two of the CoGs had actively prepared answers beforehand: one said he had spent several hours reflecting on the questions prior to the interview. I believe this only added to the depth and quality of their responses.

The interview schedules for both sets of participants [Appendix E and Appendix F] were almost identical, with only minor alterations made to each for the purposes of accuracy and relevance. As to the interview questions, a distinction can be made between content mapping and content mining questions (Legard et al, 2003). Content mapping questions are intended to offer the interviewee an opportunity to identify for themselves what they regard as the key issues. For example, the first set of questions was asked, in part, to reveal the participant's previous experience and understanding of the headteacher-CoG relationship. However, very quickly, what emerged was a detailed revelation of their entire professional perspective, of themselves and of governance and workplace relationships in general. Content mining questions are designed to generate an in-depth understanding of a specific detail, an example here being the question on how the participant reacted to the phrase 'critical friend'. Asking for such a precise reaction enabled me to formulate an exact comparison between all the participants.

In order to maintain focus throughout the interview, a series of sub-questions was added to each of the research questions. Whilst the hope was that the interviews would be free-flowing, with participants feeling confident enough to develop their answers without fear of being cut-off or restricted in any way, I was also conscious of the need for each of the interviews to adhere to a similar pattern of response so that appropriate comparisons could be made afterwards. The sub-questions were therefore used as a guide or a prompt rather than as a formal or restrictive mechanism in my line of questioning.

I remained aware throughout of my role and participation within the interviews. At all times, it was vital that I maintained eye contact with the participants to demonstrate my interest and focus; likewise, I remained mindful of my body language and tone of voice when interjecting or probing for further information. I also avoided taking lengthy contemporaneous notes, in part to avoid appearing distracted or give the participant the impression that I was uninterested.

Regarding my positionality as a former headteacher, I was aware of both the benefit and hindrance this could play within the interviews. It was certainly the case that the participants at times acknowledged my prior experience of the relationship, as shown through their use of phrases such as 'as you'll know' or 'I don't know whether you found this when you were a head'. My reaction in such instances was to nod in confirmation but avoid any substantive intervention. In hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers assume their prior knowledge, experiences and biases cannot be fully bracketed, as the researcher is the primary analytic tool (van Manen, 2015). However, as far as possible, researchers seek to minimise this in a process known as 'epoché', which entails putting aside prior knowledge or experiences so as to isolate and focus upon the participants' experiences (Lauterbach, 2018). I believe I upheld Kvale's (2007) suggestion of 'qualified naïveté', whereby 'the interviewer should be curious, sensitive to what is said – as well as to what is not said – and critical of his or her own presuppositions and hypotheses during the interview' (Kvale, 2007: 12).

The interviews were recorded through an iPhone and a small digital recording device, the participants being made aware of this beforehand. At the end of the interviews, it was explained that a transcription of the interview would take place and that this would be sent to them within a fortnight for them to look over and make any amendments or redactions. The day after, they were thanked via email and the transcripts were signed off soon after, again via email.

4.5 Data analysis.

Unlike in quantitative analysis, there are no clearly agreed rules or procedures as to how to analyse qualitative data. From the outset, two principal concerns pervaded. The first was that I wished to uncover specific detail about the relationship through analysing responses to the research questions: for example, I hoped that answers regarding communication would indicate common or typical practice. This is an example of 'content analysis', which determines not just why a

certain situation exists but why and how it emerges, or, as defined by Patton (2002), 'any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings' (Patton, 2002: 453). The second is that I wanted to understand the feelings and emotions of the participants as they engaged in the sensemaking process. Although this was anticipated beforehand, it became clearer as the data collection period progressed that each participant was keen to tell their 'story': how their outlook, conduct and approach was inextricably linked to their background and past experience. In that way, 'narrative analysis' also became an integral part of the process, as what was being said in response to each of the questions was couched within a sometimes lengthy and involved personal account, which was indicative of not just how they operated individually but how they approached – and then co-created – the relationship in the manner they did. Thus, within the analysis, individual stories, and the way they were told, were woven in, in the manner in which Riessman (2005) suggests (from a structural analysis standpoint):

> 'Emphasis shifts to the telling, the way a story is told. Although thematic content does not slip away, focus is equally on form – how a teller by selecting particular narrative devices makes a story persuasive. Unlike the thematic approach, language is treated seriously – an object for close investigation – over and beyond its referential content.
>
> (Riessman, 2005: 2)

Both content and narrative analysis are subsumed within IPA methodology. The approach taken with this research is similar to that outlined by Smith and Osborn (2015), although they stress that there is no prescriptive methodology to IPA, believing that 'qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages' (Smith & Osborn, 2015: 39).

The IPA approach follows an idiographic process, starting with a detailed examination of one interview transcript before moving on to others. The analysis begins by focusing on specific words and phrases, gradually expanding to

sentences, paragraphs, and eventually the entire interview. Each interview is then considered in relation to the next, creating a continuous process of interpretation known as the hermeneutic circle (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This ongoing movement between smaller parts and the overall whole allows the researcher to connect subtle details, such as a pause, emotion or a casual remark, to broader themes, enabling a deeper understanding that can shift back and forth as needed.

Alongside this specific methodology, the research adopted the analytic hierarchy (Figure 4) devised by Spencer et al (2003). This is made up of a series of 'platforms' or stages, which involve different analytic tasks to enable the researcher to gain an overview and make sense of the data. Spencer et al (2003) viewed the analytic hierarchy as particularly appropriate for studies requiring 'thematic, largely cross-sectional analysis based on interpretations of meaning' (Spencer et al, 2003: 213). In so doing, it reflects the demands of the research questions within this study given the manner in which the interviews are structured and the cross-comparison of participants' responses.

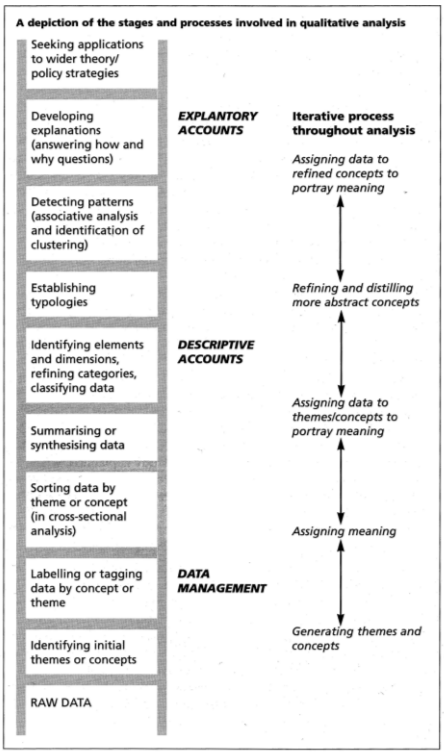

Figure 4.1: The analytic hierarchy (Spencer et al, 2003: 212).

The first stage of the hierarchy relates to data management, sorting and synthesis. The sixteen interviews yielded a considerable amount of data: over 100,000 words in total. The process of transcription using Office 365 was fast but the checking and editing process was time-consuming, as parts of the text needed refining when hesitation made some comments repetitive or confusing. As an aid, I listened to the recordings whilst doing this task, which served to rekindle – and enrich – my contemporaneous thoughts about the interviews as well as gain an in-depth knowledge of the text. It was also possible during this phase to detect early themes and these were documented alongside the transcription process.

What struck me at this stage was how powerful and insightful each of the interviews had been. This was on several levels: first, as an 'insider', I found what they were saying of huge interest, especially as it is rare for headteachers and CoGs to discuss this relationship publicly; second, I was overwhelmed by the participants' honesty and candour, on both a practical and an emotional level; and, third, I was humbled by how trusting they all were of me and my reaction to what they were saying, some only occasionally bracketing their responses with a reminder about confidentiality.

Once the transcriptions were complete, I then moved onto the second stage of the hierarchy, where the data is used to form descriptive accounts. To that end, I compiled an overview of each of the relationships through summarising and synthesising the responses of the dyads into a merged set of responses to each of the research questions [an example is given in Appendix G]. This enabled me to develop a thorough insight into each relationship, as each response was juxtaposed with that of the other participant, so that points of similarity and contrast became immediately evident. This process halved the amount of data I had to deal with, as I was able to remove less relevant responses from the data and condense and focus the rest.

These eight overviews then served as the raw material through which I was able to conduct analysis across the relationships as part of the third stage of the

hierarchy: explanatory accounts. To assist in this, a thematic coding analysis was devised in order to identify recurring beliefs, themes and ideas. Saldana (2013) divides coding into two stages: First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. For the First Cycle, I used four main approaches: descriptive, emotion, values and In Vivo coding. Descriptive coding assigns labels to categorise information or factual responses, whereas emotion and values coding signify more abstract feelings. In Vivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language, largely because I sought to 'honour the participant's voice' (Miles et al, 2014) and not lose all of the idiosyncrasies contained within the data. In this way, I was able to provide the analysis with a degree of breadth and depth.

One decision taken at this stage was to elide some of the sub-questions together for the purposes of analysis to aid clarity and avoid repetition. Thoroughly reading and re-reading each overview yielded a large number of individual and numbered codes, relevant to the responses to each of the revised research sub-questions. Some of these codes were used regularly and the coding system enabled sub-categories to be added for precision and accuracy: for example, under the code regarding 'meetings', further categories were added for length, frequency and follow-up. As the coding process developed, the system was regularly adjusted, again to aid clarity. A full coding schedule can be found in Appendix H but an extract below illustrates how a section of it was devised.

Research Question 2:	**To what extent is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment process (or at its earliest stages)?**		
a. From the perspective of Headteachers A to H, how significant was the CoG during their appointment process?			
Code		**Sub-Code**	**Note**
2a.1	Positive impact	2a.1.1 Friendship	
		2a.1.2 Warmth, kindness	
		2a.1.3 Professional interest	
		2a.1.4 Similar values/background	
2a.2	Neutral impact		
2a.3	Negative impact		
2a.4	No involvement		
b. From the perspective of CoGs A to H, how significant was the headteacher during their appointment process?			

Code		Sub-Code		Note
2b.1	Positive impact	2b.1.1	Honesty	
		2b.1.2	Likeability	
2b.2	Neutral impact			

Table 4.4: Analysis coding for Research Question 2.

The use of computer software, specifically NVivo, was initially considered, but felt to be unnecessary for two reasons: first, I had already developed a thorough knowledge of the data through compiling the overviews; second, I was concerned about how far the software would be able to pick up on the subtleties of what was being said – and indeed, how and why it was being said – and thus not an efficient use of my time.

As a result of the coding process, I was then able to embark on Second Cycle coding, which enables researchers to move from isolating codes to identifying patterns. This can be done through using a series of diagrams or pictures but, in this instance, it was more appropriate to utilise narrative description, as similarities and differences between the participants' accounts were often complex and subtle and not applicable to the sometimes binary choice necessary to compile graphic analysis.

This analytical process – beginning forensically with words and phrases and ending with expansive overview – was repeated several times as the analysis was developed, in keeping with the iterative approach of the hierarchy.

4.6 Ethical and safety considerations.

Prior to conducting the research, I undertook comprehensive training on research ethics and integrity as part of my doctoral studies at the University of Nottingham. I attended two seminars led by Professor Mary Oliver, one exploring the broader historical and social contexts of academic research ethics, and another, more practically oriented, on preparing ethical review applications within the School of

Education. Additionally, I successfully completed both the compulsory and optional modules of the University's online Research Integrity course. These experiences, along with written resources provided by the University, equipped me with a solid understanding of ethical considerations in research and the practical steps involved in submitting an ethics application. Alongside this training, I prepared a detailed Data Management Plan, which set out how data would be collected, stored and protected in accordance with institutional and legal requirements. The ethics proposal was finally approved [Appendix A] after the second submission, following a suggestion that the measures assuring participants of anonymity and confidentiality needed strengthening.

The principal consideration regarding the ethics of this research was that, for it to be meaningful, a great deal of honesty and self-reflection was required from the participants. By definition, the headteacher-CoG relationship is a private and sensitive one, often regarded as 'secret', which was one of the original reasons for the research. It was feared that participants could feel uneasy about giving honest answers to specific questions, out of a concern that these answers could be fed back, perhaps unwittingly, to their counterpart or be identified in the eventual research. There was also the risk that the questioning would reveal aspects of the relationship that might otherwise be unconsciously hidden. Considerable reassurance about trust and confidentiality was therefore given to avoid this outcome.

The second was regarding the confidentiality of the data collected and the anonymity of the participants within the final thesis. Various strategies were included to bring this about: assurances of confidentiality were communicated to the participants [Appendix D]; a data management strategy was followed assiduously so that all data was kept securely to ensure there was minimal chance of leakage or cross-contamination; the data has been thoroughly anonymised throughout and any recognisable details of the participants or their schools removed; transcriptions of the interviews have been approved for use in writing by the participants so that they are reassured about how the data will be used.

An additional ethical concern related to my positionality, given my professional background. I had met all four independent school headteachers previously and there were mutual connections with three of the other four. This could have potentially resulted in me forming a more favourable opinion of them rather than the CoG due to ignorance or bias (conscious or unconscious). Being aware of this possible outcome, I endeavoured to minimise the likelihood of this through a close adherence to the interview schedule and through careful analysis of the data provided, avoiding, wherever possible, any temptation to presume, over-infer or to 'fill in the gaps'. Having been given ethical approval for the research by the university beforehand, I faced no questions or concerns about my approach throughout the course of the data collection process.

4.7 Validity and 'generalizability'.

Any research, in order to justify any resultant claims, needs to face tests of validity and 'generalizability'. Within quantitative studies, researchers seek to produce an objective and unbiased account of reality, where predictable situations or relationships can be observed or replicated in different contexts. In qualitative studies, this is more difficult, as it is unlikely that researchers will be able to study a sample large or representative enough for their findings to be beyond doubt and thus reproduceable elsewhere. Most qualitative researchers accept these limitations, given it is they who determine the production of knowledge through formulating the research questions, choosing the methodology and interpreting the findings.

Likewise, it is impossible for them to undertake research with a huge sample: not only is this unwieldy and expensive but it also may make it even harder to make sensible and cogent deductions from the findings. Some writers have therefore sought to find more palatable alternatives to validity and generalizability, such as 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability', 'confirmability' and 'authenticity' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Different terms but the principle is the same: that is how

far the results of the research can trusted and reliably deployed. For the purposes of this study, therefore, both terms will still be used, albeit with these other terms subsumed within it. Qualitative researchers thus assess validity and generalizability from a slightly different standpoint, believing that it is still possible to affirm a claim to both.

Yardley (2000) set out a series of four broad principles through which it is possible for qualitative research to establish validity. The first is sensitivity to context, or an ability of the researcher 'to analyse the subtle, interacting effects of context and time and to engage with participants to create new understandings' (Camic et al, 2003: 15). This is achieved through a thorough knowledge and analysis of relevant literature, particularly of any related studies or research, a sensitivity to 'the perspective and socio-cultural context of participants' (Yardley, 2015) and an honest assessment of any potential impingement of researcher on the 'world' of the participants. This was achieved through my prior research being thorough and my previous experience as a headteacher being beneficial where possible (through an understanding of key terminology and awareness of certain tensions or situations) but limited where necessary (through avoidance of personal anecdote or intervention).

The second relates to the level of commitment and rigour within the research. A sample of eight relationships, involving sixteen individuals, led to interviews lasting over twenty hours in total, leading to the production of a large amount of data. A larger sample would not necessarily have produced data which significantly impacted on the findings and, as Yardley (2015) states, 'the selection of your sample may be less important than the depth and insight of your analysis' (Yardley, 2015: 266). Validity is therefore secured through the depth of the analysis rather than the breadth of the sample.

The third focuses on the coherence and transparency of the research or how the aims of the research match the outcomes. The aims of the research were limited to examining the headteacher-CoG relationship, using LMX to illustrate how such

relationships form and develop and then have the potential to impact on leadership and strategic planning. The outcome of the research is to assess how far this was shown to be the case and what broader points can be made about the conduct of high-level executive relationships within schools and elsewhere. Ensuring that each stage of the process reflects the desired aims and outcomes is one method of granting validity to the study.

The last stresses how validity can accrue from an assessment of the impact and importance of the study. If qualitative studies can be determined as valid because they highlight a certain 'truth', then that truth can in some ways be determined through the resonance created by a research study. Throughout the process, the research participants commented on the importance and potential utility of the research, their reflection on the questions asked – and their own responses – reinforcing my own belief in the relevance of the research focus.

Generalizability has become increasingly associated with quantitative research due to its focus on finding universal laws and statistical generalisations (Delmar, 2010). That a qualitative study can possess generalizability has therefore been dismissed (Polit & Beck, 2010) or viewed as unattainable or irrelevant (Kitto et al, 2008). However, according to Carminati (2018), it can exist if the interpretivist paradigm lies at the heart of the research: in that way, the term generalizability reflects how far the results from a qualitative study reflect the theory not the population (Polit & Beck, 2008). Within this study, for example, the analysis of the findings focuses on how far these relationships echo those within the LMX framework rather than making absolute claims about all headteacher-CoG relationships. The wider resonance of the research comes from how far it reinforces our understanding of the theory as to how such relationships emerge and develop rather than providing a novel template of how they do.

Delmar (2010) makes a similar point: that generalizability is possible but only after careful consideration of the 'situation' (i.e. the context and nature of the research focus) and the methodology used. Delmar (2010) also asks a more fundamental

question about what generalizability actually means within qualitative studies such as this. Generalizability, as a concept, suggests that there are findings or conclusions related to one situation that can be lifted and transferred to another. Such an application not only makes sense but helps to justify the purpose of the research. From an epistemological perspective, quantitative studies seek to understand an object of knowledge – something we can decisively know. Qualitative studies, in contrast, focus on a subject, something which is 'changeable and connected to the life world and in relation to context' (Delmar, 2010: 120) and, in so doing, move away, to use Aristotle's terms, from the notion of 'episteme' (knowledge which holds true at all times and in all situations) towards 'phronesis', which 'has its sphere in particular circumstances, is variable and depends on context' (Delmar, 2010: 121, after Aristotle, 1936). Thus uncoupling generalizability from replicability enables us 'to accept that context-dependent knowledge, with its different mode of expression, can also offer true understanding' (Delmar, 2010: 121).

To that end, this study was never principally focused on providing some sort of blueprint as to how headteacher-CoG relationships should be conducted. This is naturally of interest and it may well be that those reading this study may recognise elements of behaviour and practice that could be modelled elsewhere. Being a phenomenological study, it is more a study as to how leaders, when placed in a (most likely) novel and peculiar circumstance, endeavour to make sense of the relationship for their own personal and professional benefit. In that way, it is more appropriate to generalise about the behaviour of the participants and the sensemaking they undertake than it is to suggest that one pattern of relationships could or should be transferred from one context to another.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION

5.1 Responses to Research Question 1.

Research Question 1:	**To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-Chair of Governors (CoG) relationship?**

Summary:

- None of the headteachers or CoGs received any guidance or training prior to taking up post. One CoG was assigned a mentor following appointment, largely at his behest.
- Some of the headteachers benefited from informal advice given by former headteachers and CoGs (often due to fortunate chance encounters); some also gained from experience of governance.
- Some headteachers and most CoGs had served on boards before, which indicated models to follow (or avoid), but appreciated this did not prepare them for the unique aspects of the headteacher-CoG relationship.

The responses from Research Question 1 confirmed the sparsity of first-hand knowledge or experience of the headteacher-CoG relationship prior to taking up post. Where that did exist, for headteachers especially, it was usually fragmented and based on tangential awareness of certain situations or on the back of anecdotal advice from immediate superiors. Previous experience as a governor undoubtedly helped, although this gave an impression of the overall relationship rather than any specific or detailed insight.

None of the participants received any specific guidance or training prior to their appointment which informed or assisted them in understanding the headteacher-CoG relationship. Headteachers A and B admitted they had *'very little'* knowledge beyond their normal interactions with governors in their capacity as deputy heads, with Headteacher B saying he had '*no idea how it would work or how to make it*

work and was what was required of it, so it was very much kind of feeling my way through it, if I'm honest'. Headteacher C noted the lack of training and the absence of any substantial guidance. Likewise, none of the CoGs received training prior to taking up post or recall this being offered.

The one slight exception to the above was CoG H, who received some external training and mentoring, when, on appointment, he sought out a mentor and, due to School H still being part of the local authority, was assigned a school advisor working at the local authority to support him:

> *'It was mentioned as something I could have and I said 'I'm having that' ... Early on, I didn't know – you don't know what you don't know, you don't know who to ask when things happen … She's really good, very helpful.'*

CoG H was neither a graduate nor from a conventionally professional background – as he freely admitted. In contrast to those with professional experience, he saw the job of governor (and the board) in a slightly different light, seeking to transfer the skills he had gained through running and developing a medium-sized business. However, throughout the interview, he insisted that he knew he had a lot to learn and was willing to accept advice from those he regarded as 'experts'. Headteacher H saw this as indicative of CoG H's approach and humility and was supportive of him doing so, not viewing the introduction of an external advisor into the relationship as any sort of threat:

> *'I think that gives you a good picture of [CoG H]. He wants to do things really well. He wants to take advice on things and he's got a good source of support. I've got no problem with that. [The mentor] knows me. She's known me for a number of years, having worked with her. She's an Ofsted inspector. She's worked across schools all over the country, so him asking her advice is absolutely essential. So that he can make sure he's on the right path. And I think that's probably made him a better Chair because he seeks that external [support].'*

Some headteachers recognised that they had benefited from insights into the relationship given when they were deputies. Headteacher D recalled how his headteacher *'was open with me'* as to how he was *'forever haunted'* by an earlier

relationship, which had resulted in him having to resign, and that this gave Headteacher D awareness of *'a fairly extreme relationship'*. Headteacher C said that, whilst not breaking confidences, he did learn from his headmaster about the topics he and the CoG were dealing with and the dilemmas they faced: *'He would just say 'yeah, I was just chatting about that … or there's a big disciplinary going on'.* Headteacher G felt that he had a good understanding of the relationship, having worked closely with the previous two headteachers (at School G), where they would both talk about the relationship *'a little bit'*. Headteacher F started *'to pick up on those nuances of the relationships, just from the way that the headteacher is talking or not talking, the frustrations they're showing or not showing'.*

The fact these interactions were recalled some time after the event – it was over eighteen years since Headteacher D had been a deputy – demonstrates the power of personal advice and support. The insights offered were highly valued and regarded as relevant and incisive. However, they did not offer a rounded view of the relationship and relied a lot on the recipients drawing their own conclusions from what was being said. Such conversations also often occurred through luck and happenstance. For example, Headteacher C benefited from the fact his weekly meeting with his (then) headteacher began five minutes after the latter had spoken with the CoG (so the meeting was still fresh in his mind), although there was an intent by him to develop him professionally:

> *'He talked about it because he was very good at developing me as a potential head rather than just seeing me as an Academic Deputy.'*

As well as receiving advice from past employers, several headteachers recognised the wisdom gained from encounters with other practitioners, which they put down to professional and personal good fortune. For example, immediately prior to becoming headteacher, Headteacher H was a leadership advisor in the local authority. In this post, he worked with about twenty schools and led governor training, including for CoGs. He therefore gained a thorough appreciation of governance, governing and 'best practice'. Headteacher E's mother had been a

CoG of a primary school when she was growing up. Although she appreciated that that was more of an operational role than in a secondary school – *'you're kind of a friend to the school, you're really supportive'* – she had *'also seen what my mum had done in terms of being part of quite difficult meetings and HR stuff and complaints'*.

Headteacher C also had regular access to his previous CoG, who served on the Education Committee:

> *'Getting to know the Chair of Governors – who was a very, very important bigwig outside of [the school] – I felt very privileged for him to take the time to talk to me and to see regularly how he worked with the other governors ... I knew that it was a really key role … so I think I was lucky.'*

Experience of governance – and of the headteacher-CoG relationship in particular – accrued, therefore, through informal, rather than formal, exposure.

Those in their second headship inevitably gained some insight from their first post, although this did not always prepare them for the relationship in their new school. The knowledge acquired was not necessarily transferable and sometimes gave a false sense of security to those who were confident or successful in one post when they moved to another. Headteacher B recalled how the two CoGs in his first headship were benign figures who were prepared to let him and his leadership team run the school as they wished, with little challenge or strategic input; the greater challenge from the CoG at School B represented a significant change (and shock) for him. Headteacher D formed very positive relationships with the four CoGs at his first school, leading him to believe that this would always be the case, which it was until the appointment of CoG D.

All but one of the CoGs had board experience prior to taking up post. This was either because they had served as headteachers in other schools or because they had been on boards in their own professional lives. However, prior board experience did not necessarily indicate exposure to practice they wished to emulate: CoG A cited two relationships which were very much determined by

circumstance and which, in some ways, informed his practice as CoG because he sought to do the opposite; CoG E's insistence on the lack of a personal dimension to the relationship was conditioned by the impression that those he had observed were *'too familiar'*, which was not what he wanted *'because I've seen that and it hadn't worked out very well'*.

Those working outside education felt that they were able to bring across that experience to the headteacher-CoG relationship: CoG B believed holding senior positions in both the NHS and academia made him *'well-prepared'* for the role; CoG C said he *'had a very clear idea'* as to how he would conduct the relationship, having chaired a board of a professional organisation (*'I guess I've just absorbed a feel for that sort of relationship, who's actually in charge and who is operationally leading.')*; CoG D felt he was *'aware … of all of the issues in regard to being the Chair of a Board of Directors or a Board of Governors'* , having previously been the CoG at a state-funded primary school and *'on numerous occasions in my professional career'* been the chair of a board. This is not to say that they believed their understanding was complete. CoG B acknowledged that, whilst he knew a lot about the relationship, having observed as a governor, it was *'not to the extent that's unfolded'*. CoG C cited his own confidence deriving from his time as Vice-Chair, which acted as something of an apprenticeship to becoming CoG.

5.2 Responses to Research Question 2.

Research Question 2:	**To what extent is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment process (or at its earliest stages)?**

Summary:

- Successful encounters within the appointment process can have a significant impact on how the headteacher-CoG relationship is established and developed. This is more likely within the independent sector, as the CoG has more freedom to control and participate in the process.
- This initial connection is often based on shared values and a common understanding. This is only possible where time is allowed within the process to communicate on a personal and informal basis.
- Likewise, when either party is not involved in the process, it can take longer for them to trust and work effectively with each other and there is arguably a greater risk of the relationship ultimately breaking down if no attempt to gauge compatibility in advance.
- Some headteachers displayed a degree of awkwardness when admitting to involvement in appointing the CoG; one indicated regret when he was not.
- For most CoGs, accepting the position of CoG was not dependent on, or even affected by, their opinion of the incumbent headteacher; a minority were attracted to the role due to whom the headteacher was. This was more a reflection of the fact that the future relationship with the headteacher was not regarded as either of concern or potentially problematic.

Four of the eight headteachers commented on how the respective CoGs played a very positive and significant role in the appointment process. Particularly impactful in all four cases was the amount of time, care and interest the CoGs devoted to getting to know the applicants.

A stand-out example was Headteacher A, who credited the appointment process for establishing the close relationship she had with the first CoG at her school. This was due to the fact that she was applying for the headship of a Roman Catholic school, when she herself was an Anglican. As she was not Catholic, she was *'asked to jump through several additional hoops … including a dinner with the Chair of Governors and this religious [governor]'*. This level of attention served to create a *'special relationship'* with the CoG, as *'had it not been a potentially contested appointment, those extra sessions would not have been put into place … I would not have got to know that person so well had it not been for the particularity of the appointment'.*

She also felt her gender was significant: *'because she herself was, I suppose, a female, she was advocating for me.'* Following appointment, Headteacher A continued to enjoy *'a very, very positive, very close relationship'* with the CoG and, although she left the post some years later, Headteacher A continued to enjoy a friendly relationship with her and the success of that relationship served as a template for her relationship with her other CoGs.

Headteacher B was impressed by the fact that the CoG asked to visit his current school (where he was headteacher) prior to his final interview:

> *'We walked around and it was just interesting, you know, to do that for four people … it's quite a big time commitment but, actually, he said he found that invaluable because he could really see how people interacted with me, including pupils.'*

This approach by the CoG made a big impact: *'I thought, well, he's taking this process really seriously and he was asking quite probing questions.'* On reflection, Headteacher B saw that this in part set the tone for his headship, in that he appreciated that his relationship with the CoG was likely to be far more intense and probing than he had experienced hitherto.

Headteacher C's first contact with the CoG also had a significant impact. Immediately on arrival at the school, he was given *'a nice, warm welcome'* by CoG C and interviewed for half an hour:

> *'Sitting down for half an hour with the Chair of Governors … you often get that in the last round but, for everyone from the beginning, that first of all gave me a positive impression.'*

CoG C's passion for the school was also evident, as was the clarity of expectation he had for the headteacher: *'they wanted a head who would lead them rather than put in place their vision.'* Throughout the interviews, CoG C *'was always very warm and very smiling'*. CoG C also offered the job to Headteacher C in person:

> *'I was left with a very, very positive impression. I thought 'the guy knows what the school stands for, it's deep in his bones. He's personable, he's talked about wanting a leader, not a 'yes man' so to speak. And he's been involved at every stage and very warm'. So I've got a good impression then and, since then, it has been, in the main, very good.'*

Headteacher C's ability to form an immediate connection with CoG C was anticipated and reciprocated by CoG C:

> *'We had a process where they would have a day at school ... I had a meeting at the beginning of each day with each of them … and I'd sort of give them my spiel, my connection to the school and then I had a short, informal conversation.'*

Within that conversation, he thought:

> *'Are we of one mind? Do we have a similar, open approach to these things? Are we on the same page with the kind of things I'm talking about? I think, when it came down to it, [Headteacher C] was the only candidate I would have appointed!'*
>
> *'It's about making that connection. It's something around soft skills, this person is on my wavelength … and he's also very good at getting other people's wavelength and that's what I hear about him now, such as with prospective parents.'*

On questioning, CoG C recognised that he would have been less likely to have identified these traits within a panel interview. Indeed, Headteacher C was only asked for interview when CoG C had rejected the twelve original candidates, selected due to their potential on paper rather than in person.

In a similar way, Headteacher F was particularly struck by the fact that the CoG showed him around the school when he first visited:

> *'I had an hour, just with him, to have a conversation with him, to get an idea of where he was coming from and where he sat within my vision for education and my expectations of the way that schools operate.'*

For Headteacher F, this showed *'his investment in the process'*.

As well as a practical involvement, more significant for Headteachers C and F were the qualities and values of the CoG, which they were in part able to discern from their own research but also from their individual meetings. Headteacher C said that an additional factor was that he and CoG C *'share a non-white heritage'*: *'That came up a couple of times, not in the interview process but afterwards, and helped to bring some of that closeness.'* He was unsure whether this was a factor in the appointment process – CoG C told him not – *'but you're always questioning yourself around this'.*

Headteacher F undertook some specific research beforehand into the CoG at School F to ascertain *'their background, their job, what they do and whether there were any tensions within the school'*. He subsequently found out, at the second interview, that the two of them had grown up on the same housing estate. This was impactful and led to him being happy to accept the job once offered in part because the CoG *'was somebody who absolutely shared the same values with me'*. In contrast to this, where the CoG was less significant in the appointment, the headteachers did not feel the same level of bond, beyond gratification that they were appointed. The CoG at School H was *'fully part'* of the process, as the school is still maintained by the LA but, in schools which are part of MATs, appointments

tend to be centralised with Chairs of LGBs having largely a symbolic role. There is, therefore, a significant contrast in the appointment experience, it not being surprising that, in those relationships where the CoG was able to be more proactive, they were able to become established more quickly following appointment, sometimes even before the new headteacher took up post.

For most CoGs, accepting the position was not dependent on, or even affected by, their opinion of the incumbent headteacher, perhaps illustrating how little the relationship figures in prior understanding of the role of CoG. For example, CoG F was the Vice-CoG during the interview process for Headteacher F (and became CoG soon afterwards) but admitted he did not consider the potential future working relationship he would have with the successful candidate. Similarly, CoG H was involved in the interviews but the fact that it was Headteacher H who was going to be the next head did not play a role in his decision to step up. CoG D was adamant that Headteacher D was irrelevant to his decision. In his mind, he was being appointed to chair the board and the headteacher had no role or significance within that process.

Some CoGs, however, did view it as significant. When asked how important Headteacher B was to his decision to become CoG, CoG B says it was *'quite important'*. He had seen Headteacher B in action and he *'seemed like someone who would be very nice to work more closely with'* as *'we have shared values and … shared styles'*: *'Actually, I think it was probably more important than perhaps I realised at the time.'*

CoG E's positive impression of Headteacher E also played a part:

> *'The person who had introduced me to the school in the first place, and had got me on board, I'd known professionally and as a friend for many, many years, rated [Headteacher E] highly so I took that as a good, you know, a wholesome justification.'*

Although CoG A did not specifically cite Headteacher A as a reason, his connection with her predated him becoming a governor and it was she who first phoned him

to enquire whether he wished to join the board. CoGs A and E were both former headteachers and CoG B had served on a hospital board, suggesting that they may have been more cognisant of the need for a degree of personal chemistry within the role, although this is speculative.

The role of the headteacher within the appointment process for CoGs revealed a degree of awkwardness. Some headteachers were reluctant to accept that they played a decisive role, insisting that the appointment of the CoG should rightly be taken by the board alone. For example, Headteacher A was adamant that she *'was not particularly involved at all'* in CoG A's appointment: *'I think I was quite abreast of what was going on but it was not my appointment and it absolutely shouldn't be.'* However, there were conditions to that contention:

> *'The head needs to at least have a view and, if there was some major disagreement, the board would need to think very carefully about that appointment because they have got to work well.'*

However, in response to a question on trust, Headteacher A stated that she *'had always trusted and respected him because I'd asked him to join the board. So, of course, I go out and forage for people, but then I'm not … I'm always very quick to say, I think you'd be great, but actually it's not my appointment because you're technically my boss.'* So, whilst Headteacher A may not have been directly, or technically, involved in CoG A's appointment as CoG, she was instrumental in inviting him onto the board and made it clear that her trust in him was longstanding and predated his appointment as CoG.

Other headteachers were also willing to admit a role within the appointment process. Headteacher B said he was *'consulted'* about CoG B's appointment:

> *'It's fairly apparent ... that he was an obvious, excellent choice for the role. He was already the Chair of the Education Committee. So I got to know him quite well through that. So [the first CoG] came to see me to say he was stepping down and that he had spoken to [CoG B] about it. Have you got any objections to that? Any concerns? But you know, it's quite an easy*

one in a way, because I thought [CoG B] would be a superb chair. So I was quite happy to support.'

Headteacher E was instrumental in replacing the existing CoG through negotiations with the trust. When it came to the appointment of CoG E, the trust approached him and then he came to Headteacher E for a *'chat'*: *'I think I probably talked about how I would be happy to work with somebody … he was checking me out basically … 'can I work with her?' and then he said 'yes'.'* Headteacher E said that, on meeting CoG E, she realised that she *'could get on with him. By that, I mean I could have a professional relationship, that I would feel comfortable to talk to him freely, to be honest.'* Her only concern was that he was an ex-headteacher and whether that would lead to him telling her *'how to run the school'*.

Headteachers A, B and E all recognised that the relationship was not going to function if there was not a degree – or even a high degree – of compatibility. Headteacher D admitted some remorse on this point, given that he was happy not to be involved in CoG D's appointment:

'He was Vice-Chair and was going to take over as Chair. I thought he'd make a good Vice-Chair; I wasn't sure about whether he'd make a good Chair. There was nobody else who really wanted to do it, who I was happy to do it … So, no, I didn't have much of a say in it but I wasn't overly fussed because there wasn't anyone else obvious.'

His lack of involvement (and concern) he put down largely to the pandemic: *'there were other things on my mind at that particular time and this seemed fairly peripheral … because I thought of him as a fairly benign presence, who didn't really understand the school.'* Headteacher D remembered that he was largely dismissive of CoG D as a potential CoG:

'I didn't want to spend too much time explaining things to him that I didn't think he was grasping anyway, which probably sounds a little but counterintuitive. Maybe a slight cockiness: that I've been doing this for 16½ years and I knew what I was doing. I could handle anybody who came my way anyway.'

He recognised that his subsequent difficulties with CoG D could have been avoided if he had had more involvement within the appointment process and, indeed, had laid the groundwork for succession planning beforehand.

5.3 Responses to Research Question 3.

Research Question 3	Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?

5.3.1 Contact, meetings and communication.

Summary:

- All but one of the relationships regarded regular contact as essential. Just how regular contact should be was usually arrived at through mutual agreement and then modified, if necessary, in the light of experience.
- It was seen as important that this should include a formal meeting, most commonly every fortnight, where they could each raise matters of concern.
- These meetings were usually face-to-face, calendared and worked to a plan, sometimes to a fixed agenda, sometimes to an ongoing and amendable list. There was sometimes follow-up but this varied.
- Outside of meetings, communication was usually through email or telephone but sometimes became chattier and more informal, focusing on common interests, such as sport. The importance of this was sometimes dismissed by participants, although the manner in which it was discussed conveyed affection for such alternative interaction.

Relationship	Frequency	In-Person	Agenda	Follow-Up	Further Contact
A	Weekly	X	X	X	X
B	Twice a term	✓	✓	✓	X
C	'Regularly'	✓	X	✓	✓
D	Rare	✓	X	X	X
E	Fortnightly	✓	✓	✓	✓
F	Fortnightly	✓	✓	✓	✓
G	Infrequently	✓	X	X	X
H	Every 3 weeks	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 5.1: Summary of meeting arrangements and contact outside of meetings.

Early in each relationship (apart from Relationship D), there was a discussion about when and for how long they should meet. There was no specific pattern as to whom instigated this conversation or the arrangement they came to. Sometimes the incumbent would explain what had been done before and, at other times, the incomer suggested something new. This was largely on the back of what they had been used to or seen elsewhere rather than from an appraisal as to what they needed from the new relationship or the deployment of 'best practice'. Headteacher B said it was *'quite a consultative process'* between himself and CoG B as to how often they would meet, whereas Headteacher C was quite insistent that he would like a weekly meeting.

Some recognised that formalising a meeting structure was not always easy so early in a relationship, especially when, in most cases, one of the participants was established and the other was new. When both were new, a decision was more likely reached through negotiation. For example, Relationship F started together at the same time and so the format of the relationship developed from *'a sort of mutual listening and deciding how we would go'*; Relationship H also started together and so *'the first few conversations were probably around the meeting schedules, which gave us a really good platform to show that we had that mutual respect, we kind of had that trust'*.

The most common suggestion was that they should meet every fortnight for approximately an hour and, where possible, face-to-face. Some concern was expressed about such meetings being too onerous or time-consuming, indicating that having a face-to-face meeting was regarded as something of a luxury, a distraction from more important business elsewhere. This was why some were keen for a strict time limit to be placed on meetings. For example, CoG F believed a meeting every fortnight, limited to thirty minutes, worked best: meeting with the headteacher too regularly was *'too intrusive'* as it then *'becomes very operational because they get entangled with more stuff than they need to get entangled with, because it's very easy to shift the conversation into something we shouldn't be talking about'.* Others preferred longer meetings, whilst still being mindful of

individuals' time commitments. Relationship E, for example, met fortnightly for between sixty and ninety minutes, believing that this was a more efficient use of time than shorter meetings elsewhere:

> *'All the way through, I'm constantly thinking 'she's incredibly busy, I mustn't steal her time' because I know, being in that role myself, you're clock-watching all the time to the next thing. So I must make the most efficient and effective use of time. I thought I could do that by fitting in around other things. Actually, I realised that wasn't the most efficient and effective way and to actually say 'right, every other week we will sit down for an hour to an hour and a half and talk business' is.'*

The regularity of meetings was regarded as important but the motives for meeting varied. CoG H, for example, relied on the meetings to keep him abreast of what was happening in school so that he could report back to the rest of the governing body. Headteacher H valued them because it helped to *'reassure [CoG H] that I'm the right person for the job and we're doing the right things … It was necessary'.*

Headteacher C felt that meetings helped to establish the relationship, necessary should it have to face rockier times further down the road:

> *'You want to create a relationship when there's no urgent reason to have to work together, when you're not dealing with an emergency; that you build up trust credit with people early doors because it's going to be really useful later when they have to work closely with you over something more challenging.'*

CoG F used the meetings to ask Headteacher F about *'his welfare and his wellbeing'*, him learning over the years not to be content with the answer *'OK'* to see if he, or those around him, require more support. Some responses combined some or all of these features: certainly none felt meeting did not hold value or purpose. The principal concern about meeting was the time it occupied and, on occasion, the inherent risk of the CoG being drawn too extensively into operational issues.

A clear preference was given for face-to-face meetings, CoG F believing, for example, that he got *'a lot more from my meetings face-to-face … you can see body language ... You can see all those, you know, intonations'*. During the pandemic, meetings tended to move online. Relationship E thus began with online meetings, something CoG E felt was deleterious to the establishment of the relationship, as he felt the meetings were *'awkward'* because *'you can't build a relationship in the same way'.* As soon as they could, he therefore met Headteacher E when he was in school. Some spoke of impromptu meetings taking place when the CoG came into school (indeed, some found themselves coming into school on an almost weekly basis). 'Touching base' for even five or ten minutes was seen as important and helpful – from both angles. This confirmed the importance of direct, in-person contact, even if not a lot is communicated. It is affirmation through presence, a recognition of the other's involvement and commitment. CoG H, for example, said he regularly made unannounced visits to school to *'pop in and say 'hello'"*, specifically out of concern for Headteacher H's welfare and to *'reach out more to be supportive'* because *'it's a high-pressure job and where else does he go?'*.

There was no set format for the meetings. Some of the CoGs drew up an agenda, or a list of items they wished to discuss, which would then be used as a starting point for discussion within meetings; others preferred to leave it reasonably flexible. CoG E built up a list of questions beforehand that he wished to ask and began the meeting by asking them; Headteacher E then followed up with issues in the school (*'on the boundary between operational and strategic'*). This then *'merged'* into a more general conversation. CoG F said *'we always have a list'* of matters to discuss and *'generally, we have the same things on the list'*. They tried to create a list in advance via Microsoft Teams but that did not work and so, instead, they tended to bring their own to the meetings.

Most formal was perhaps Relationship B, who only met formally twice a term, the principal purpose of the meeting, in CoG B's eyes, being to discuss Headteacher B's *'objectives'*. The meetings had an agenda, which they each contributed to and

shared beforehand. The discussion was then written up and shared, which they then used as the basis for the next meeting. CoG B suggested this approach following his experience of conducting appraisals in the NHS; indeed, he viewed the roles as similar as they are *'about managing people for the benefit of a population'*.

Relationship B was, however, unusual in following up meetings formally. Headteacher C was more typical when he confirmed that there was no precise follow-up but that there *'maybe an e-mail afterwards but it's never like a record of what we discussed'*. In this instance, he credited CoG C's memory – or his ability to write notes afterwards – for ensuring continuity between meetings. CoG E did experiment with reporting back to the governing body on the content of the meetings. However, this turned out not to be a good idea (as some matters were entirely *'speculative'* and potentially stifling) and so this was quietly dropped. The reports, intended to demonstrate openness, also had the opposite effect for some governors, suggesting that the two of them were somehow *'cooking the books behind the scenes and having too close a relationship'*. More often, participants took notes and referred to these at subsequent meetings. This allowed for continuity but avoided a sense that discussions were set-in-stone or that ideas formed in one meeting could not be challenged or revised in another.

Some relationships remained in regular contact outside of formal meetings. Relationship F was one example, as explained by CoG F:

> *'We do share information and he'll give me stuff that he's researched and he'll send it my way and I'll send things his way. So, that's a really nice kind of relationship, where we do share, he'll phone me and we do a lot of texting.'*

Relationship C also maintained informal contact outside of meetings via e-mail and WhatsApp. CoG C believed this was as, if not more, effective than formal meetings and felt equally as able to contact Headteacher C as the other way around. CoG C liked to be informed, especially about major issues potentially affecting the school *'instantly, or as soon as'* and considered this *'a really key part of the head's*

responsibility': *'Anything of concern that can get escalated to the Chair of Governors, I need to know the details.'* He believed he informed Headteacher C of his wishes in this regard but this may also have been triggered by a reluctance of the previous headteacher to share openly. Hence CoG C learnt from one relationship to better another.

Headteacher H also found he could contact CoG H when he needed to – *'I'll call him up in the car on the way home sometimes to say that something has happened and you just need to know.'* – as did Headteacher B, who felt confident in being able to contact CoG B, even if he was unsure of a decision or felt he had to admit to a mistake. He confessed that he would not have been as confident with the previous CoG: *'I would have thought it's kind of unknown how this will go down.'* Such a comment demonstrates how an ability or willingness to be open is not a given in this relationship: it needs to be built on trust and a level of confidence that what is being communicated will be received in a manner which avoids adverse judgement. This naturally came through positive interaction on formal occasions but also through a familiarity derived from impromptu or informal contact. For example, Headteacher B felt he had become closer to CoG B through his presence at school events:

> *'I see him in those contexts much more as well as the meetings. He's also local and much more willing just to kind of drop in and that kind of informal conversation and chat is something that's very much more a feature of our relationship and not something I did with [the previous CoG].'*

This is not to say that contact outside of meetings necessarily generates a closer relationship. When Headteacher G spoke to CoG G on the phone, it was to inform her of a decision or a piece of information: he was not asking for advice or for a conversation. If he was looking for advice, he would tend to go elsewhere, most likely someone at the MAT or the headteacher when he first came to School G.

Given that Headteacher G increasingly needed to focus on developing relationships with MAT personnel, CoG G was understanding that their role as a 'sounding board' had been diminished. Her meetings with Headteacher G consequently

became less frequent (than she had had with previous headteachers) and communication was now largely through email *'if there's an issue'*. She appreciated that, given the demands on Headteacher G's time, that there may have been good reason for her seeing less of Headteacher G but *'I hope [Headteacher G] doesn't feel that I've abandoned him. I don't feel that he's abandoned me. But you have to respond to the situation'.* CoG G acknowledged that she was kept up-to-date with events and school information and felt consulted as well as informed, although has learned to *'work with'* headteachers who have not done this *'because it's a personality trait'*.

The way CoG G expressed herself here indicated a degree of lament for a time when, as CoG of an autonomous governing body, she was more of a focus for the headteacher. Now, as head of the LGB, she recognised that her relationship with Headteacher G had been superseded by relationships elsewhere.

Relationships A and D were outliers in the way that they communicated. They showed the contrasting approaches that participants can take to meetings, in their format, frequency and purpose.

Relationship A had considerable formal contact, having a calendared, weekly telephone conversation which could last as long as an hour. The meetings took place by phone, as CoG A did not live near to School A (Headteacher A had met with his predecessors face-to-face every week). Headteacher A valued these meetings highly, considering the discussions to be quite detailed and involved, most often focusing on short-term concerns and priorities: *'it's an absolute coming and going and weekly update of anything'*. Even though she was highly experienced, having been in post at School A for sixteen years, she relied a lot on CoG A's advice, particularly as his background was in education: *'I will ask his advice about things which might be, on one hand, operational and I will say to him 'this is operational' but I want your advice on X.'* CoG A was conscious that Headteacher A shared a considerable amount with him:

'She finds it very reassuring to share operational things with me. Quite often, there's quite a lot of operational stuff that I didn't need to know but I don't overplay that because, if it's a concern to her, I'm willing to listen to it for five to ten minutes.'

CoG A admitted that he provided a *'listening ear'* in part because he appreciated the potential isolation of headship and partly because he had the time, due to being retired. To an extent, CoG A appreciated the extent of Headteacher A's communication with him. He agreed with the *"no surprises' principle'* and said, as a result, *'there are very few occasions when I think I should have been told about something at an earlier stage'* and that, on balance *'it just works'*. He was concerned, however, that Headteacher A's confiding in him was a substitute for her doing so with her senior team.

Conversely, Relationship D met formally extremely rarely. In Headteacher D's estimation, *'we probably have had two sit-down meetings in nearly two years'*. Even though he had had relationships with several CoGs previously, Headteacher D did not suggest a pattern of communication with CoG D when the latter took up post: *'To some extent, I was quite happy not to do so. I also knew that, as far as he was concerned, coming here on a regular basis wasn't going to happen anyway and I don't like meeting people over Zoom.'* Headteacher D's reluctance to meet was partly due to CoG D living a considerable distance from the school and partly because *'he is a very, very different character from any of the other Chairs of Governors that I have worked with'*. Headteacher D acknowledged that CoG D had some strengths but was scathing regarding CoG D's personal qualities:

'In terms of really sensing somebody who understands the school and how schools work – and how I work, as somebody who gives me any personal support (beyond agreeing that it's the most appropriate thing to do) – he has been entirely absent. I like him but, as Chair of Governors, he has offered me very little.'

'He has probably been the most untypical of all the Chairs that I have worked with and the least effective and the least supportive; so, to some extent he's not the best example of what I've been used to. But he's an interesting example of what doesn't work.'

CoG D was also equally content that he did not meet Headteacher D often but for different reasons. He saw the nature of his communication with Headteacher D as reflecting his view of their respective roles: that the headteacher was the CEO responsible for running the school and he was chair of a charitable company, overseeing governance and strategy. When asked how often he communicated with Headteacher D, CoG D remarked *'oh, not very often'*. On the days when he attended School D, he would see a lot of Headteacher D but it was only *'[every] couple of months, three months'* that they have a formal meeting, *'unless something crops up'*. CoG D's summary of the position – '*I don't feel [Headteacher D] needs me around all the time and I don't feel I need to be around [Headteacher D] all the time.'* – could be construed as either an honest appraisal of a relationship where neither party perceives any benefit in meeting or a serious misunderstanding of the importance of relationship building within a context of senior leadership. Contact with Headteacher D was therefore strictly on a 'needs must' basis, in direct contrast to the regularity and intensity of Relationship A.

5.3.2 Trust.

Summary:

- Nearly all participants recognised that trust was essential for the relationship to prosper.
- Prior familiarity aided this being in place at the start of the relationship.
- Some participants emphasised the importance of a strong personal connection to engender trust, whilst others focused more on the impact of positive working experiences, especially in challenging circumstances.
- CoGs were more likely to indicate that trust was conditional and that it could not always guaranteed should the relationship deteriorate.

Almost all the participants recognised that trust was vital. Their responses to the question of how far they trusted each other often depended on the starting point of the relationship. As, in most instances, the CoGs were appointed after the

headteacher, the two individuals already knew each other, although not perhaps as intimately as they were to later. In such circumstances, it was more natural for a trusting relationship to develop.

Relationships A, B and G were already familiar with each other and so it was more straightforward for trust to be established early on. They had seen each other in action in a range of contexts and so trust was able to form on the back of recognised and respected methods of working.

Headteacher A was quite open about her considerable trust in CoG A, which was perhaps not surprising given the integral role she played in his appointment: *'I think I just had 100% confidence in him from his appointment.'* She believed her trust in him developed out of respect: *'there was a lot of respect first of all, and it's on the basis of respect that you then trust their judgement, [and] that was in place before he became the Chair.'* She was confident that this trust was mutual: *'as I trust and respect my Chair of Governors and the governing board, so they respect and trust me.'* CoG A appreciated Headteacher A's confidence and trust in him and saw both as important but felt it important to stress that this was *'not a blank cheque'*: *'It's not the Chair saying, you know, 'I will agree with every single thing you do'. It's much more subtle than that and it's got to be two-way.'*

Headteacher B had already worked closely with CoG B when he was Chair of the Education Committee, which helped, but he believed that complete trust had to be earned and felt he was able to do this through quieter times during the early part of his headship: *'you earn a bit, you put a bit in the bank, and then you begin to draw down on it and I feel that at the moment.'* CoG B concurred with the idea that trust develops over time, although he believed that his *'steady state'* is to trust people *'until they demonstrate they're either untrustworthy or incompetent'*.

Similarly, Relationship G had worked alongside each other for some time prior to Headteacher G's appointment and so, whilst their roles were different, a basis of trust already existed for them to build on.

All three relationships illustrate how familiarity can engender respect and confidence and, ultimately, trust. However, in Relationships A and B, it was stressed by the CoGs that this was not without limit or conditions: Headteacher B recognised this but Headteacher A was a little too effusive perhaps in her faith in CoG A. In his interview, CoG A admitted that he sometimes shielded Headteacher A from some of the more adverse criticism of her within the governing body, which he found testing on occasion in regard to his loyalty to her.

Relationships C, E, F and H attested that trust is not always automatic and that it can take time to build. The foundations of trust in Relationship C were laid between appointment and Headteacher C taking up post and then developed through regular and honest communication and a willingness to act collegially on decision-making and board management.

Headteacher E was clear that she and CoG E have considerable trust in each other, even though the relationship is only in its second year:

> *'I think it's grown. You don't instantly have that whole kind of 'I trust you implicitly with my life' because you don't know somebody. But I think, you know, the moments that we've had, where we've had difficult situations that we've worked through together … it just adds to that understanding of how people work and how they respond to other people, how you see them behave towards others, and all of that adds to that trust.'*

CoG E believed that trust had been achieved *'mainly through being absolutely, exhaustively thorough and proper about the way I've gone about things with the governing body in terms of getting things right'*. As well as being on top of governance, CoG E also feels he has earned trust through being available for Headteacher E to consult:

> *'I've always been there at the end of the phone, if there's been an issue, you know, maybe on Friday evening: 'oh, gosh, [Headteacher E]'s rung, this must be serious'. So I'll get back to her and I'll respond. So there hasn't been any delays if needed.'*

Headteacher E's belief is that trust develops principally from a personal connection, based mostly on the other person's personal characteristics and behaviour. It is also the outcome of successfully working together but it is often the manner of that work that matters more. CoG E reflected much the same sentiment: although his initial instinct was to suggest that trust came on the back of working together, his later comment about immediately responding to phone calls indicated an instinctive emotional response, which Headteacher E implied was at the heart of her trust in him.

This is also reflected in the comments of Headteacher F, who believed that trust grows through being supported, especially through challenging periods of change:

> *'I think trust in any relationship, in any sort of organisation, is hugely important. I think trust comes over time and it comes over sort of shared experiences as well, doesn't it? He was very good at supporting me with quite major decisions [and] … supporting me through challenging circumstances … He could have quite easily have stepped back and said 'don't disturb the status quo here, just carry on with how we've been doing it'.'*

CoG F agreed about it developing over time – *'I think you earn your trust, don't you? It's not automatic.'* – and, as a result of him offering support during challenging situations, particularly in public ('*That builds trust, doesn't it?*'). He also appreciates the way that he asks questions, avoiding aggressive interrogation, as he sees it, in favour of a *'softer, calmer, more gentle way'*, coaxing rather than interrogating. He also knows when to stop asking questions, as he feels that can lead to a loss of trust.

Headteacher H feels he began to trust CoG H *'probably after the first couple of meetings'*. This was because, on becoming headteacher, Headteacher H was deliberately frank in drawing attention to the school's weaknesses, including some financial mismanagement, and outlining the tough measures he saw as necessary to improve the school. CoG H was receptive to this frankness, even when some

staff took exception to this approach. CoG H sees the importance of trust and having a *'connection'*:

> *'If you haven't got a connection, then how is it going to feel good to share a problem with me? And I find this quite difficult to get my head around. But, you know, this is transparency, openness, mutual respect, these sorts of things. I hope that means he's going to be able to say look 'I've dropped the ball here – I've done something here that might not be right for the school, [CoG H], but I need to let you, as Chair of Governors, know about it'.*

Both participants in Relationship D distanced themselves from the need to have trust in each other. When asked whether the CoG should seek to gain trust through being something of a confidant to the headteacher, CoG D remarked that *'it's a role that the Chair can't escape [although] I'm not saying it's a role that the Chair should seek'*. Headteacher D felt that there was trust in the relationship but only one way: *'I think he feels he can trust me. I sort of don't feel I need to trust him in a way and maybe that's been part of the problem.'*

5.3.3 Personal and professional boundaries.

Summary:

- Most participants recognised the importance of a personal dimension to the relationship, although some found it difficult to explain what this meant, insisting that there were boundaries and that it was important to remain professional.
- On questioning, several went on to admit that there was more personal contact than they indicated initially, suggesting a degree of unease, or even guilt, about being personally close.
- Some headteachers valued having a personal connection with the CoG extremely highly, something the CoGs were not always aware of.

- Other headteachers were adamant that they did not need that degree of closeness and indeed positively avoided personal interaction, preferring to deal privately with work-related stress.
- There was no indication that personal closeness was a problem or somehow impacted on the professionalism of the relationship, although the methodology here may not be the mechanism through which this can be measured.

All participants, save Relationship D, acknowledged a personal dimension to the relationship. For most, however, there was a distinct reticence in indicating a closeness beyond what they defined as 'professional'.

Both participants in Relationship C had no difficulty in recognising – and, indeed, celebrating – their personal friendship. CoG C recognised, as soon as the appointment process had been concluded, that his future relationship with Headteacher C would have a personal, as well as a professional, dimension. He felt that they had a large amount in common, showing the power of shared characteristics:

> *'[Headteacher C] and I connect not just as professionals but also because we have similar backgrounds. We're both offspring of [non-white] immigrants, both, you know, scholarship boys at grammar schools and have a lot of interests in common. I imagined, even when I appointed him, I could see this is the kind of guy I could be friends with, even if we weren't having that relationship as chief executive and chair.'*

They therefore met several times during the long period between appointment and Headteacher C taking up post. Headteacher C was invited to a governors' 'away day' and they went out twice to dinner with their respective spouses. Such contact CoG C saw as vital in order to instil trust and confidence. Likewise, Headteacher C has never shied away from having a strong personal relationship with CoG C.

> *'Maybe once every month or two, we'll just go out for a drink at the local pub – because we live near each other – and often we'll have something business-related to discuss but the night is very rarely about business. We'll*

do work for a minute and then we'll just have a nice time chatting about his kids, my kids, the cricket, whatever it might be.'

Headteacher C would go on to say later in the interview that such closeness would prove vital once he had to deal with a number of challenging situations, such as the death of a pupil and the pandemic. His ability to be honest and vulnerable with CoG C was in part enabled by the close personal contact they had enjoyed beforehand.

There was certainly personal warmth within Relationships A, B and E, although they stopped short of extensive social contact.

Headteacher A valued CoG A's kindness, generosity and broader concern for her:

'He always says things like 'God, you know, you must be absolutely knackered at this point in the term and … I hope [your husband] is taking you away for a lovely holiday and, he always says to me, pack the corkscrew and the books. It's wonderful and we have such a laugh. That's what I love about him.'

She put this approach down to CoG A's character and background as an educationalist, meaning that he was *'someone who understands this very, very particular dynamic'*. She did go on to say that this is *'a crude generalisation because the lawyer and the business person I had [as CoGs] were very, very sympathetic and, because they didn't know much, they did their homework … they learned their stuff'*. CoG A protested that he does not venture into the personal but it was clear he understood the pressures faced by Headteacher A:

'I don't actually go on welfare very much – I think it's rather overstated. But … I recognise that, for many heads, their life is quite lonely. And I think that heads are perfectly entitled to see the Chair of Governors as a willing, listening ear … for the Chair to be able and willing to listen to the head, and effectively to say, you know, I'm willing to give you some time because you've got a very demanding job, a demanding life etc.'

Headteacher B admired and respected CoG B and believed his personal qualities underpinned his approach to the role:

'He's very wise. He's been through some incredibly challenging situations himself so he … brings quite a helpful sense of proportion. And he's a man of great faith as well and that's actually something that is quite a bedrock. You can really know the kind of values that he's bringing to the role … [CoG B]'s wife is also very supportive and is also understanding of what it's like for [his wife] being the head's wife.'

CoG B reciprocated and said that he had sought to engage with Headteacher B socially, inviting him and his wife to dinner, although stressed that he had only ever done this once. When they met, they also talked about family and their private lives. He felt that this was evidence of friendship.

When asked whether he felt he had a counselling role, CoG B said he does that as part of the role, if that is solicited and not imposed. He certainly viewed personal objectives as important, such as exercise and self-care, as do other governors, who ask him at times about Headteacher B's welfare. CoG B said that, in the pandemic, he was particularly conscious about how Headteacher B and the other teachers were coping with the additional stresses involved.

Although guardedly, Headteacher E admitted that their relationship had become more informal over time:

'I send him silly messages about 'The Archers'. The reason for this: *'It's a tough old job and I want to have fun at work and enjoy it. And I want him to enjoy it … I think it's important to have those conversations with people, to find out what they're like and what they're about. And, you know, a little bit about your personal life. We go to [local] events and stuff like that. And I like to know what he likes, what he enjoys. And he's a very kind, thoughtful person.'*

One episode impacted significantly on their relationship. This was when she was ill at home, at a time when she was facing *'a difficult situation'* at school, which led her to seek the assistance of CoG E:

'I was in bed and I didn't get out of bed for seven days. I basically phoned him and I couldn't actually speak without crying and I am not like that at all. So it was me being very, very vulnerable in front of him and he was so kind. He's a very kind man and he was just like – because it made me

laugh like deep within me; I wasn't feeling like laughing at the time – I remember him saying, 'right [Headteacher E], I think maybe we'll tackle this when you are feeling a little bit better'.'

This was quite early on in the relationship and Headteacher E was not totally sure how CoG E would react. However, she felt his kindness, professionalism and *'normality'* in that moment brought them closer together from then on (although they had not spoken about it since).

CoG E felt he needs to, in some ways, rationalise or explain away attempts by him to support Headteacher E emotionally or to demonstrate support for her, out of a concern that this will not be viewed as 'professional' by others.

In Relationships F, G and H, there was arguably more respect than warmth: indeed, in all three cases, the headteachers were adamant that there was no personal dimension to the relationship. On questioning, though, it was clear that this existed, although there was unease about naming it as such. Headteacher F said that a personal relationship was to be *'avoided at all costs'*. This was not just with the CoG but with all staff:

'If I'm going to be turned off by someone or blocked by someone, or it's going be done the other way, I'd much prefer that I don't know them as a friend or somebody I've had a beer with because, actually, that's harder to take … I've always kept a professional distance from everybody.'

Outside of formal meetings, they *'exchange WhatsApps'* but these were largely about school business, although, on rare occasions, they communicated about their private life:

'When I know he's going on holiday, when he comes back, I say 'how was your holiday?'. His daughter is the same age as my son. They've both gone off to university. So I would ask him how [she] is getting on at university and things like that. But, you know, we never text about a football result or anything like that.'

Headteacher F recognised that CoG F asked after his welfare but, again, he was resistant to lowering his guard:

> *'I do have a very thick skin, as I say to [CoG F], but what I guess [CoG F] is very good at … in the same way I do with my direct reports, whenever I finish a meeting, the last thing I say is: 'how are you, do you need anything?'. And [CoG F] does that all the time. And, yes, I am very thick-skinned and I have my own sort of ways of dealing with things – mainly involves putting on a pair of trainers, AirPods in and going for a run. That's just how I churn things in my head. But [CoG F] is very good at asking about that and … when I said 'I'm absolutely fine, I went for a run … I felt like running through a brick wall, so I ran a little bit faster'. And then he's 'you sure?'. He's very good at following those things up … From that point of view, he's very supportive of wellbeing as well.'*

Slightly in contrast, CoG F considered there to be a personal dimension to their relationship. For CoG F, social exchanges about children and holidays were *'deliberate'*:

> *'It's about understanding what's important to the head and what they have got in their lives because, you know, everybody's got a life outside of work and it's understanding what that is and how that might influence him.'*

He recognised that there is *'a fine balance because you don't want to become 'pally''*, as it is important to have *'a professional boundary'*. CoG F was reflective as to whether such a boundary may inhibit the opportunity for confidential discussion and recognises the vulnerability of headteachers when opening up to CoGs, the people whose hands ultimately hold their fate: *'that's why I suppose I ask questions directly … to try and allow them that space to open up.'* CoG F accepts that Headteacher F presents *'very professionally and very cautiously'* and so he probably has *'to work harder with [Headteacher F] than a lot of people'*.

Headteacher G and CoG G are quite far apart in age and this may explain the formality of their relationship. Headteacher G was certainly equivocal as to whether CoG G is someone who 'has his back', who is there to support him when he finds things difficult: *'That wouldn't be the relationship I would have with my Chair of Governors. I don't do that with anyone, not even my wife. I just try and deal with it internally.'* All contact with CoG G tends to be reasonably formal and linked to school business:

'[CoG G] is always at the end of a phone. I know I can contact her. We can talk through most things. I'll keep it always professional. I'd happily go out for a drink, if she wanted to, but it would be discussing school matters or, for a meal, it would be discussing matters … I know enough about [CoG G] and family and what she does to be able to engage in polite conversation, and she likewise about my family. But I'm quite a private person. I'm not interested in social media and all that nonsense and I think [CoG G] is of the same sort of traditional ilk, really. We don't go out for a curry. I quite like to keep work and personal life separate. I think it's important. This job is intense enough as it is and occupies almost all your waking hours, so I don't think I need also to go out with people.'

CoG G recognised that she has been closer to previous heads – the daughter of one is godmother to one of her sons – but she still feels close to Headteacher G, defining him as '*someone you trust, someone you are comfortable to be with, someone you appreciate'.* Furthermore, she saw it as important that she tells Headteacher G that he is appreciated and was quick to pass on praise that she received from parents and others.

Headteacher H has been reluctant to become too friendly with CoG H – they have never socialised together, even though he has been asked – largely because it could be awkward should CoG E have *'to call me out on something'*. However, he does foresee them meeting socially when they can fix a time, although he feels it is important that they are not viewed as *'a friend … in that way'*. CoG H concurred about the distance and accepted that he could enquire more about Headteacher H's life about school: *'I consider myself a caring person. I hardly ever ask him about how things are at home and stuff like that.'* However, due to the regularity of attendance in school, he saw how close Headteacher H is to his deputy and made the presumption that Headteacher H receives considerable personal support from him: *'I think I would know if it was the other way round. And then I'd probably be more … I'd be here more with a different hat on to support my head.'*

There was no personal angle to Relationship D. Headteacher D, whilst he believed that his relationships with CoGs in the past had been professionally strong, had not viewed it as necessary, or desirable, to develop a personal aspect to the

relationship. He had been to meals with some of them and remained on friendly terms with some past CoGs but he had never reciprocated hospitality. Due to the distance CoG D lived from School D, he did not see or communicate with him socially, and felt there was little personal warmth or connection.

This was highlighted to him when, having woken with severe chest pains, high blood pressure and anxiety, he was signed off work with work-related stress. This was the first time he had experienced anything like this in his career. On contacting CoG D about the situation, he received a brief e-mail response, which read *'I concur, I think this is the right decision'*. Headteacher D was shocked by the coldness and brevity of the communication and contrasted with the warm concern from the Vice-CoG.

CoG D believed that it is neither his role nor in his skill-set to assist or advise Headteacher D, let alone have a personal dimension to the relationship. He presented this in quite stark terms:

> *'I don't want to sound a bit extreme but, if I didn't think he could do the job, we'd then have to get rid of him ... it's as simple as that. The most important thing governors do is to appoint the right head. And, if it turns out not to be the right head, they've got to move pretty quickly to change the situation but you can't repair it.'*

When asked whether there can be a 'middle point' between appointing the head and dismissing the head, CoG D said: *'Not in my view, there isn't, no.'* He likens the position and the relationship to that of *'football coaches'*: *'If we don't get a star in every department when the inspectors come in, we need a new head.'*

5.3.4 Change and development.

Summary:

- Most participants attested to the ways in which the relationships had become more developed and inter-twined. As trust had increased, so too had the scope and intensity of their working relationship.
- For most, this was on a personal and strategic level and arose sometimes through practical measures – such as pre-planning board meetings and sitting side-by-side when governors met – and bonds of familiarity and mutual respect.
- Some CoGs acknowledged that this reflected the fact that their relationship with the headteacher was closer or, indeed, superior to that they had with the governing body.
- Whilst the way in which the relationships based in independent schools evolved largely due to the participants themselves, in the state-funded sector, the academisation process and the move to MATs had become the dominant factor in shaping the pattern and purpose of interaction between headteacher and CoG.

In nearly all instances, the relationships deepened over time, with the participants realising the personal and strategic benefits of them working closely together. This was most evident when there was a clear bond of trust between the two. It was also apparent when the CoG acted in close alliance with the headteacher in their management of the governing body.

Relationship C was perhaps the closest and most interdependent. CoG C viewed the relationship as *'multi-faceted'*, given the varied methods of communication, the range of topics discussed (both school-focused and personal) and the regularity of contact. Their desire for strategic synergy was reflected in the fact they arranged 'pre-board' meetings, in which Headteacher, CoG C and the chairs of individual committees meet to discuss the main board agenda and conduct preliminary discussion. This worked for Headteacher C and CoG C because it

ensured they were fully briefed on what was to be discussed at the main meeting. Headteacher C admitted that this *'might be anti-democratic in some ways because we've agreed what we're going to say before … but the board is much better than that: they'll always bring up anything they need to'*.

The depth of their relationship was most evident during the school's response to the pandemic and in dealing with the deaths of three students (in unrelated incidents). CoG C realised how such events *'would grind him [Headteacher C] down'* and that, on such occasions, he wants to help in any way he can. CoG C appreciated that headteachers can receive such support through a counsellor or peers but thought he could give an added level of support as he's *'really embedded in the school and knows it very well and knows all the different interest groups'*.

Headteachers A, B and F also worked extremely closely together but stopped short of an outright strategic alliance. Headteacher A described her relationship with CoG A as *'on a completely different level'* to those she shared with the rest of the governing body *'because I share everything in the school [with him]'*. When questioned as to where he positions himself, in relation to supporting the headteacher and chairing the governing body, CoG A said that he positioned himself *'fairly close to supporting the head'*. He felt it was important that he limits any dissent on the governing body, taking two key issues into consideration: first, Headteacher A enjoyed considerable support amongst the parents and, second, only a small minority of governors voiced concern about Headteacher A. He was conscious of using skill and tact to diffuse potential and actual criticism of Headteacher A: *'a perceptive observer would realise that, you know, I'm taking it in and not agreeing with it.'*

Headteacher B also accepted that he had a closer relationship with CoG B than he did with other governors and said that '*you try and express it physically sometimes'* through, for example, sitting next to CoG B during meetings. Not only was this symbolic but, in a meeting, CoG B may turn to him and ask for

clarification, which can prove helpful. Other governors detected an element of *'solidarity'* through such physical proximity (Headteacher C and CoG C also sat together in board meetings).

CoG B felt that the relationship had 'matured in a very good way'. He felt *'privileged'* to work with Headteacher B for, although they have had to work through *'some challenging times … neither of us have got shirty'*. They worked closely together and he felt that both learn from each other: *'I find it a very symbiotic relationship.'* He was aware that the relationship could be perceived as perhaps slightly too trusting and *'relaxed'* and that other governors may wish for him to be more *'removed'*. However, he was conscious that a factor within the relationship is that he was *'privy'* to a range of information and draft planning that may not be suitable or necessary to bring up a full board level. In this position, he would naturally form a closer relationship to Headteacher B than other governors.

Headteacher F was effusive when speaking of CoG F's qualities: his educational expertise and experience *('I do think that makes a massive, massive difference.'*); the fact that CoG F was a parent at School F and so had insights from an alternative perspective (*'from my point of view, it was really useful to know sort of the word-on the street of what parents were saying'*); how he related well to CoG F due to *'a mixture of personal temperament and experience'*; the fact that CoG F was also a former pupil of the school, which gives him the *'life experience'* to place the school, its pupils and teachers in context.

Because of this positive connection, Headteacher F believed he and CoG F talk *'more often'* than he had with previous CoGs. He also viewed CoG F as a strategic partner, not least because of the pressing issue of joining a MAT. He recognised CoG F's wealth of knowledge in this area and, therefore, they had formed an in-depth bond regarding the issue, which would have been difficult, if not impossible, in another context with another CoG.

CoG F concurred that the relationship was close, although insisted that, in board meetings, he was there as a governor rather than as a support to Headteacher F. In contrast to Relationship B, he deliberately sat at the opposite side of the room to Headteacher F (although found that helpful, as *'I can see [Headteacher F]'s eyes so he knows when I'm thinking something, I know when he's thinking something, so I can kind of move it on'*) and would only side with him in a discussion if he believed in that side of the argument.

In Relationships E and H, there was an element of distance, particularly with regard to how the CoG related to the board.

Headteacher E said that, for the first time in her headship experience, her close working relationship with CoG E enabled them to manage the governing body together, a necessity perhaps given the context of School E, a new academy with a novice board of governors. For example, although the trust sent them a set template agenda to use, they discussed the priorities they wanted to establish for meetings beforehand: *'pre-meeting, we sit down, have a look at the agenda, change a few bits and pieces and have a chat about it.'* CoG E was, however, reticent about any suggestion that he might be acting in concert with Headteacher E, out of a concern as to how that might appear: *'We are very much an autonomous body and I never get any sense that [Headteacher E] is trying to, in the nicest possible way, manipulate outcomes.'*

Headteacher H knew a great deal about governance prior to his arrival at School H, whereas CoG H, who started as CoG at the same time, knew much less, hence him drawing on the services of a mentor. CoG H had now become more self-confident in his ability to lead the governing body and to hold Headteacher H to account. This is not to say that CoG H was unsupportive of Headteacher H: they communicated regularly and CoG H appreciated Headteacher H's firm leadership.

They did not collaborate on managing the board, however, nor talk in advance of board meetings, having only a short debrief after the meeting *'just to talk through*

some things' afterwards. Headteacher H said that he was not concerned about the outcome of the meetings and was confident that he and CoG H presented a *'united front'* in front of governors. He did not feel the need to sit next to CoG H during meetings for this reason. However, CoG H felt able to discuss areas where he believed Headteacher H could learn, such as through *'embracing his weaknesses'*. He also felt he was a little more *'visionary'* than Headteacher H and, in meetings, always sought to see the bigger picture, whilst Headteacher H tended to focus on data and the day-to-day.

Largely for strategic reasons, CoG D and Headteacher G were looking to redefine their respective relationships.

CoG D was pressing Headteacher D to be bolder with the long-term strategic direction of the school, instead of focusing more on day-to-day concerns. This was in line with his belief that the role of the CoG is to develop and then implement strategic objectives for the school. However, in his view, this should emerge first from the senior leadership and be presented by the headteacher to the board:

> *'I want [Headteacher D] to bring it to the board with the pros and the cons: then the board can look at it. I'm very keen that matters should be brought to the board by the management. I don't want the board sitting around having bright ideas. It doesn't actually get us anywhere.'*

Part of the reason for Headteacher G's reluctance to commit himself to a more involved working relationship with CoG G was due to the declining role and significance of the LGB. A process was underway whereby supervision – and decision-making – around finance, premises and *'everything else eventually'* will be taken over by the trust and that the LGB will be left to focus primarily on the quality of education, even though they will continue to discuss governance in its widest sense:

> *'I think the LGB has changed to become this like-minded group of people that are just trying to check that what we're doing still makes a lot of sense*

and, although we look at certain areas, we no longer actually need to be looking at them.'

As his reporting lines come more directed to trust officers, the necessity of reporting to the CoG and the LGB becomes reduced:

'The chief operating officer, all the other heads of operations and director of operations … they expect us to report more to them directly. Me to them, nothing to do with the LGB.'

This is not to say that Headteacher G viewed the LGB – or CoG G – as irrelevant: it is just that, rather than being a body he was accountable to, he viewed them as a potential ally in his future dealing with the trust.

5.4 Responses to Research Question 4.

Research Question 4:	How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs?

Summary:

- All participants recognised and understood the phrase 'critical friend'. The headteachers believed it reflected the relationship generally very well, whilst several CoGs felt it to be unhelpful and problematic.
- The word 'critical' was regarded with a degree of suspicion by some of the headteachers, who preferred to consider such comments in the context of school improvement rather than as personal criticism.
- Criticism, however subtle, was more likely to be received – and accepted – if it was delivered within a context of support.
- Headteachers also made it clear how it was not just *what* was being said but *how* it was being said.
- Most participants were also wary of the word 'friend', some viewing it as incompatible with the professional nature of the relationship.

Headteacher	'Critical'	'Friend'
A	CoG A is *'rarely … moved to make a comment about things'* and, if he does, it is done *'with such compassion and tact'* that she *'always listen[s] and I always reflect'*.	*'He's my friend because he is genuinely looking after my own wellbeing … he will advise but he will be supportive and I feel he's absolutely got my back.'*
B	CoG B *'sets very high professional standards'* and *'can be pretty sharp in a meeting'*.	A 'friend' but not uniquely, as he had also enjoyed similar friendships with previous CoGs.
C	CoG C *'is supportive with the odd bit of criticality. It's not criticism, it's asking the right questions'.*	*'What we're taking about is someone who's on your side but not through everything. They're not going to let you make mistakes without questioning you.'*
D	Not CoG D's *'job to be critical for the sake of being critical'*	*'The Chair and the head [should be] walking in lockstep:*

	but to bring matters to his attention and to ask questions – but then to *'trust answers'*.	*the Chair supporting the head's vision but being prepared, behind closed doors, if they wish to, to question it'.*
E	Criticism from CoG E not *'real criticism, not as in personal criticism. It's a critique of the situation'.*	Sees him more as *'a support',* whilst acknowledging their relationship is *'close'.*
F	Views 'criticism' from CoG F through the prism of support, but, behind closed doors, a willingness to coach and review.	Less friendship, more being *'supportive of wellbeing'.*
G	*'They* [CoG G]*do ask challenging questions … but it's all done in a very respectful way'.*	*'It is as much about making sure that I feel supported … 'just knowing she [is] there'*.
H	CoG H *'asks good questions'* and is willing to challenge, which is understandable given that he has to defend the school's actions to the other governors.	*'I trust him. He's got my best interests at heart. I think he trusts me to run the school well.'*

Table 5.2: Brief summary of headteachers' views of the phrase 'critical friend'.

CoG	'Critical'	'Friend'
A	Important that the CoG is *'supportive'* – hence his dislike of the term, as *'critical ignores the element of support'* – *'but not blindly so'*.	*'Friend, I think, is wrong from both points of view. I don't think the head should expect the Chair of Governors to be a friend. I did not and shouldn't have done. I think I expect professional support, respect, etc. That's quite different from friendship, isn't it?'*
B	'Critical' could be viewed as something negative (that governors are *'critiquing'* you) or more positive, in that they are *'just trying to nudge you in the right direction'*. CoG B is clear that his *'default position is one of support'*.	Cautious about using the word 'friend' as *'it doesn't pay to become too close in a typically social setting'*.

C	CoG C would subscribe to his approach being defined as *'supportive challenge'.*	Headteacher C *'definitely a friend'*, in that he views it as his, and the governors', role fundamentally to support the headteacher (whilst *'calling [them] to account'*).
D	*'You've always got to be critical and you've got to manage that criticism in a constructive way … The Chair of Governors has got to be ready to speak frankly to the head.'*	*'It's almost wrong to be the friend of somebody where there is a professional relationship … I have very high regard for [Headteacher D] … but it's a professional relationship.'*
E	*'I hesitate doing … those elements of challenge [and] criticism … I think this role is a little bit more in line with the role of the sovereign, in that I wouldn't want to appear as openly critical or challenging of the headteacher to the rest of the governing body and to the outside world. I think that's something that's got to happen behind the scenes.'*	*'I've always thought one needed to be absolutely clear about dividing lines between friendship and professional relationships. Because, if you look at my responsibilities, as Chair of Governors, we are the disciplinary body for [Headteacher E]. Well, what does that look like, if we regularly dine with each other?'*
F	*'The 'critical' bit isn't about criticising, and I think that's the word I don't like, because it feels like you're always being critical of the school, but you're not. I think it should be an 'aspiring friend'.*	*'I think that probably part of my job is to keep people happy and make them enjoy their job and make them want to be there. So that's the 'friend' bit I guess.'*
G	*"Critical' is an unfortunate word because it has negative connotations. It could mean 'vital' in one sense but it also means that you're tearing apart what someone's done.'*	Considers herself a friend but not a *'mate'*, believing that there has to be an element of *'professional distance', otherwise 'it could get confusing; I think it could get in the way'*.
H	'Critical friend' *'probably doesn't naturally reflect my relationship with [Headteacher H]'*. This is because he says he is *'a bit on the soft side, so I have to kind of force myself to probe*	*'I feel that there's mutual respect and good faith and intent and care and I think he does care about me. And I think – I don't know! – I care about him. But I'd stop short of 'friend'.'*

	a bit harder and be a bit more demanding'.	

Table 5.3: Brief summary of CoGs' views of the phrase 'critical friend'.

All participants recognised and understood the phrase 'critical friend'. The headteachers believed it reflected the relationship well, whilst several CoGs felt it to be unhelpful and problematic. This was more the result of semantic interpretation than a clear divergence in approach.

CoG A, for example, disliked the term, as he *'never really knows what it means [because] neither word seems to be to be quite right'*. 'Friend' he dismissed as inappropriate and disliked the term 'critical' as *'critical ignores the element of support'*. Similarly, CoG F thought the phrase *'silly'*. With regard to 'friend', he thought it related best to the act of supporting in the light of the context of the school and *'all the pressures that go with it'*. As for 'critical', he viewed it as analysing what the school can do to improve and proposing, or promoting, solutions: *'the 'critical' bit isn't about criticising, and I think that's the word I don't like, because it feels like you're always being critical of the school, but you're not. I think it should be an 'aspiring friend'.* Likewise, being a 'friend' is not about being the friend of the headteacher as such, it is about being a friend of the school and *'getting the best out of people'.*

The word 'critical' was regarded with recognition and caution by some of the headteachers. Headteacher B certainly felt CoG B had the capacity to be critical, principally through challenge in meetings, although that was often in concert with other governors. He found this criticism quite draining: *'I sometimes come out feeling I've been put through my paces. That's partly from [CoG B] but also there are other governors … there have been times when I've felt that this doesn't feel much like a friend. It just feels like a lot of criticism'*, especially as he was having to deal with a range of issues that governors do not see. As a consequence, Headteacher B ensured that he *'prepare[s] really well for the meetings'* in order ro deflect potential criticism.

CoG H appeared to be on the same page as CoG B, in that he did not view the word 'critical' in a negative light, although he saw it *'as being transparent'* and to *'keep asking questions until I understand it'*. He felt there would always need to be boundaries to the relationship, as he would on occasion need to challenge Headteacher H's decision-making (over exclusions, for example). That said, he felt the hallmarks of a close, positive relationship are there: *'transparency, openness, mutual respect'*.

Headteacher C saw criticism from CoG C in a similarly positive light – *'It's not criticism, it's asking the right questions. He's very good at that.'* – as did Headteacher E:

> *'[It's not] real criticism, not as in personal criticism. It's a critique of the situation, so I feel [CoG E] can give me a critique of the situation and ask critical questions that help shape things ... Furthermore, it's never done in a horrible way.'*

Headteacher D also stated how the CoG's role is principally to ask questions – but then to *'trust answers'*. He did not think it was the CoG's *'job to be critical for the sake of being critical'* or that *'they need to go looking for things to be critical about'* but that it is their role to bring matters to his attention and to ask questions and then accept and support the headteacher's capacity to respond.

Criticism, however subtle, was more likely to be received – and accepted – if it was delivered within a context of support and respect. Headteacher A, for example, fully appreciated how any 'criticism' is coming from such a place, largely due to her view of CoG A's genuine concern for her and feeling that *'he's absolutely got my back'.* She therefore had no difficulty in using 'critical' and 'friend' within the same sentence, believing that 'criticism', albeit relatively gentle given the context of School A, is aligned with being supportive and a friend. Likewise, Headteacher G recognised *'that is their job: to hold me to account and to ask the challenging questions'*:

> *'They do ask challenging questions in that respect but it's all done in a very respectful way and, you know, it's not 'on my toes' conversations, which it may have been in the past.'*

Asking leading questions rather than outright criticism was therefore found to be more palatable, as was an honest conversation behind closed doors alongside public support. Headteacher F cited a situation in which CoG F was publicly supportive of him when he sought to change the dress code in the Sixth Form, in the face of some parental backlash. For him, in this instance, he saw 'critical friend' through the prism of support, especially in public, but, behind closed doors, a willingness to coach and review. Headteacher F found on other occasions how, if he was facing criticism or negative news, CoG F was *'good at sort of depersonalizing some of it because it becomes [about] the organisation and the way the organisation is set up'.* CoG E held a similar view:

> *'I wouldn't want to appear as openly critical or challenging of the headteacher to the rest of the governing body and to the outside world. I think that's something that's got to happen behind the scenes.'*

Most participants were also wary of the word 'friend', some viewing it as incompatible with the professional nature of the relationship. Headteacher C, for example, implied that there were many aspects of friendship within the relationship – trust, candour, support – but not necessarily a personal friendship: *'what I think about the word 'friend', what we're taking about, is someone who's on your side but not through everything. They're not going to let you make mistakes without questioning you.'* He believes *'there's always that professional boundary'* and that it's not a friend *'like you're making in your 20s and 30s'*. CoG F was similarly muted, preferring to think of 'friend' as the act of supporting in the light of the context of the school and *'all the pressures that go with it'*.

There were several suggested alternatives to the phrase 'critical friend'. CoG C said he would define his approach as *'supportive challenge'*; CoG G preferred other metaphors, such as *"a sounding board', 'a listening ear' and 'grit in the oyster' ('you bite, it's horrible, but it's that which produces a pearl')'*.

Headteacher D perhaps presented the most holistic summary of the relationship:

> *'You can't forget that this person is your boss. The 'model' should be that 'the Chair and the head [are] walking in lockstep: the Chair supporting the head's vision but being prepared, behind closed doors, if they wish to, to question it and to ask questions about it, maybe alongside some other governors. Where it goes wrong is where the Chair and the head are in opposition to each other and the Chair considers it their role to manage the head rather than support them. So my strong belief is that it's a walking alongside rather than a face-to-face thing. Critical behind closed doors when necessary … Friend, yes, but I think it's partner … we've both got different roles in making sure this school thrives and we have to be on the same page if we're going to do that. And, if we're not on the same page, we don't do that in public.'*

5.5 Responses to Research Question 5.

Research Question 5:	How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?

Summary:

- Participants felt the boundary between operational and strategic matters was understood and that governors, particularly CoGs, respected the headteacher's primacy in operational management.
- Parent governors often presented the most challenge in this respect and headteachers appreciated intervention from the CoG when this occurred,
- It was felt that occasions did arise when it was appropriate for governors to voice opinions on operational issues and, as long as this arose out of general, rather than specific, concern, this should not be viewed as an unacceptable infringement.
- Some CoGs believed that the division between the two was at times artificial as operational policy often had strategic implications, particularly budgetary.
- A couple of headteachers freely admitted that they sought to 'manage up' the board, either through influencing appointments or, in concert with the CoG, determining the agenda – and, indeed, the projected outcome – of board meetings. This revealed how the relationship, at its most developed, could become a significant strategic alliance.
- A closer and symbiotic relationship between headteacher and CoG can be used as a model for other relationships for other relationships contracted within the school. For example, the headteacher could develop separate close working partnerships with other governors and the CoG can do likewise with other senior leaders.

All participants felt that the division between operational and strategic responsibilities was observed reasonably well, this being largely through experience of CEO-Chair relationships in other contexts or from learning 'on the

job' as a governor. For some, this was out of respect for the headteacher's (or the CoG's) ability to perform their role; for others, it arose from a practical perspective. As CoG F said: *'I haven't got enough time to be operational!'*.

Some participants believed that parent governors were the most likely not to understand this distinction. CoG D found this particularly frustrating and believed this was indicative of individuals joining the governing body with the mistaken belief that they were partly responsible for running the school instead of focusing on the business imperative of, in this case, running a charitable business.

CoG F had some sympathy with parents wishing to discuss – and influence – operational decision-making. He therefore sought, in meetings, to model questions so as to avoid them becoming too specific regarding certain pupils, subject areas or members of staff. Similarly, he tried to deflect some governors if their involvement could compromise their oversight role, saying, for example, *'if we write a policy, we can't then monitor that policy because it's our policy we've written'*.

Headteacher H cited one longstanding parent governor who persistently raised operational issues at a board level. However, he considered her *'a really valuable asset'*, even though *'she can be quite critical'*. Albeit with a slight sense of irony, he said that she *'will sometimes share some lovely snippets on social media of what people say about me or the school. It gives me the opportunity to go back and challenge it. She's very good and she doesn't [make it personal].'* He said that he sometimes needed to make it clear with new parent governors in particular that it is inappropriate to use their position to raise concerns about their individual children.

Other participants were more sympathetic and felt that occasional consideration of operational issues rightly fell within the board's remit. Headteacher D, for example, said of the 'division':

> *'My sense of the relationship is that, most of the time, if things are working well, you don't need to define it. There are sometimes little bleeds across the divide between the two but, generally speaking, those can be constructive and you don't need a rigid definition of where one starts and the other ends.'*

Headteacher E said that it is sometimes useful for governors to become involved in operational issues – one previous CoG, for example, came into school to give INSET on coaching – and headteachers have to accept that the primary motivation for some governors, parents governors in particular, will be an educational issues from within school: *'I think part of my role is being very respectful of that.'* Furthermore, it *'might be because they've got a particular skill set that would enhance something in the school. So I've got to be grateful for that but, when you're in a governors meeting, you've got to focus on governance.'*

Restrictions during the pandemic also made it difficult for governors to get a sense of what was happening in school, leading them to appreciate operational insights. To that end, Headteacher C, for example, permitted reports on school business during meetings but relied on governors reading these beforehand and then allowing for some brief questioning, which he felt *'gets the balance about right'*.

Several participants suggest that it is not always possible to separate the operational from the strategic. For CoG A, there had never been a *'clear line'* between the two, as, *'in order to be able to exercise strategic leadership, you need to have a good understanding of the way the school operates'*. However, quoting the phrase *"eyes on, hands off"*, he remarked that *"knowing the school' falls well short of saying 'you should do this, you should do that".*

CoG G did not think one could keep the operational and strategic completely separate *'because, if you've got a strategy to do something, you need resources'*, which inevitably linked back to the operational, as choices have to be made within school budgets.

Headteacher B cited the way that the board deals with complaints, which more often focus on operational than strategic decisions. Headteacher B had faced two Stage 3 panel hearings and, at those times, the governors showed *'a real degree of challenge and independence'* regarding school decisions, although *'they won't go into those areas until we're in that appeal context'*.

There was also the belief that it would be foolish not to make use of governors' expertise in some operational areas. For example, CoG C, said:

> *'You've got people with expertise in finance. You have people with expertise in HR and marketing or property management, where schools don't necessarily have people who know what they're doing and value that.'*

Examples were shared whereby CoGs used skill and judgement to ensure dissent within the board did not develop into hostility toward the headteacher. CoG A recalled one such instance, although the governor concerned was quite isolated in his criticism of Headteacher A and school policy. CoG A was therefore able to deal with them fairly – but firmly – admitting that *'this is where it's helpful to have so many ex-heads on the board'*, as they were able to understand that the governor was veering into operational matters and that *'the vast majority'* of the board had been appointed in part because they viewed Headteacher A as *'a wonderful head'*. When referring to the same governor, Headteacher A said this had led to her having *'lots of conversations with [CoG A], saying 'I found this difficult, as I did with the previous Chair'*.

CoG E was also involved in a dispute regarding the curriculum policy, which one governor believed was not being implemented. This led to a detailed discussion on the board, about the issue itself and whether this is a matter for the board to discuss in the first place:

> *'I thought that [Headteacher E] probably just wanted me to say to this governor to stop doing it but actually I thought it was better that we had that conversation at a governing body [meeting] and we did it in a very gentle way. And I was quite pleased how it worked out because we had a vote over something – the first time we've ever had a vote – and it was*

over a policy decision. And that was a really interesting discussion because we had to have this discussion about whether we are now overstepping our mark as governors. Is this an operational decision that we should leave with the headteacher or is this something that the governing body is having a say over? A vote was held and the headteacher's operational command was agreed. So, to me, that was the best way of dealing with it.'

What arose was an acceptance that, in the short term, the implementation of schemes of work was an operational matter for the school (and, therefore, not within the board's remit) but, over time, if these were consistently not being rolled out as planned, then that was a strategic concern (which is).

CoG G said she felt that she was able to shut down any attempt within board meetings to veer into the operational *'quite politely but firmly'*. However, she appreciated that governors have a right to speak and to raise issues and do so usually with the best of intentions:

'Everyone has a bee in their bonnet, that particular 'thing', but, largely, the bee is a supportive bee.'

Operational issues can also have strategic consequences. For example, a recent attempt in School G to limit the use in school of mobile phones was undertaken in part to uphold the school's ethos and hence it was appropriate to examine at board level. Likewise, the issue of gender equality and neutrality will have a resource issue when it comes to issues such as changing rooms.

It also became apparent from the interviews that some headteachers, alongside quiescent CoGs, actively 'managed up' the board, in part to limit the likelihood of future dissent, in part to ensure the board becomes more strategic. Headteacher A actively sought out future governors – *'I've been proactive in suggesting recruits to the board'* – although she rejected the notion that she was engaged in 'managing up' the governing body, arguing that, beyond recruitment, governors were able to act independently in their strategic oversight of the school. Although she may *'steer a conversation'* within meetings and *'informing the debate and the discussion'*, she was adamant that *'it's their meetings'*.

Headteacher B believed that CoG B was far more of a strategic partner than his predecessor, where strategy was devised by the senior leadership team and then *'essentially rubber-stamped'* by governors. In the latest iteration, CoG B created two extra meetings to talk about the plans: *'the plan is still very much the senior leadership team's plan but I think it has been quite closely shaped and changed in the light of input from the governors.'* Headteacher B appreciates this joint approach on strategy and remarks that he aided this process through ensuring that the draft had enough rough edges to provoke discussion and finetuning. He also sought a firm alliance with CoG B beforehand:

> *'I wouldn't want to go into a meeting if [CoG B] was unconvinced … I would want to be in a stronger position, to have more alignment between the head and the Chair than that.' To that end, he is aware of how far he is involved in 'managing up' the board, 'much more consciously than I did earlier in my career'.*

Headteacher C freely admits to 'managing up'. He asks all governors to meet up individually for coffee once a year and will ask them *'how are you, what do you think about how the school's going, is there anything in particular you want to raise at meetings?'*: *'It took me two or three years to learn that that's a good idea. I'd overheard somebody saying it at a conference or something. I don't think it's a generally massively done thing but I've picked it up and I started with the ones that I don't see very often. And that's been really, really helpful as it happens. But what it means is that I get a lot of feedback and, at least to my face, everyone tells me I'm doing a good job and, yeah, I could be doing better here or perhaps don't concentrate so much on this. The governors come up with the ideas and I say 'great, let's have it for an away day' so that they feel involved.'* He also cited the pre-board meeting as a way of determining whether anything *'contentious'* is likely to be discussed. He also spent a lot of time reflecting on governance and has been involved in realigning the committee structure and refocusing governors' attention and has been *'given free rein to suggest what I think would work and they have taken it on board'.* He appreciated that this had to be done carefully, as, although governors *'want leadership … they don't want to be told they have to do it a certain way'*.

CoG F met with all governors individually once every half term, in part to *'steer them away'* from raising operational issues in subsequent board meetings. He also modelled questions so as to avoid them becoming too specific regarding certain pupils. Similarly, he will deflect some governors if their involvement could compromise their oversight role. For example, *'if we write a policy, we can't then monitor that policy because it's our policy we've written'*.

CoG H reduced the number of board meetings in order to facilitate more link visits and he sometimes uses the reports from these to gauge whether governors are becoming *'over-operational'*: *'I think it's about being attentive, being alert. You can see it if governors are becoming too operational on their link visits. You will see it happening. So I think I'm alert to it. I manage it perfectly well but I'm aware of the principle and I'm aware of trying to manage it if should crossover.'*

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Overview.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) focuses on dyadic relationships between leaders and followers, in which high-exchange relationships are characterised by significant levels of trust and respect. This chapter discusses the four aspects of LMX most apparent from the data.

Section 6.2 examines the role of self-concept in LMX, sometimes referred to as self-identity. Whilst, separately, headteachers and CoGs will adopt a variety of self-concepts to perform their various duties, those that exist within the headteacher-CoG relationship will have certain specific, most likely unique, qualities. What these are, how they are formed and to what effect will comprise the initial analysis. The section also discusses power: what that means in the context of the relationship, where it comes from and how it is enacted. A Foucauldian perspective is adopted to demonstrate that the existence and distribution of power in such relationships is complex and that relationships function best when headteachers and CoGs understand the power dynamics at play and adapt their approach to accommodate the historical, societal and structural forces that shape them.

Section 6.3 explores the role of dialogical communication in LMX relationships, focusing on what is communicated, how and why. Drawing on Barry and Crant's (2000) framework, the chapter analyses factors affecting communication effectiveness, such as frequency, diversity, symmetry and relational perceptions. It highlights how trust, empathy and shared attributions contribute to relationship success. The key finding is that frequent and open communication fosters richer interactions, whereas rigid hierarchical structures or goal-oriented motivations can hinder relational depth. The section also discusses how macro-level influences, such as school structures and governance models, shape communication styles,

ultimately arguing that 'interactional richness' emerges when both parties align in their motivations and communication behaviours.

Section 6.4 focuses on the issue of trust and how and why this is of fundamental importance to elevated levels of LMX. Using Mayer et al's (1995) model, it identifies key factors influencing trust in headteacher-CoG relationships, such as ability, benevolence and integrity. Trust develops as participants take risks, with responses to vulnerability shaping its strength. Interview data shows varying levels of trust-building, with some relationships forming quickly due to shared values and others requiring time. Trust also blurs professional and personal boundaries, with some relationships resembling friendships. The section suggests that, whilst trust enhances collaboration and leadership effectiveness, excessive closeness may challenge objectivity and accountability. Ultimately, heightened levels of trust foster mutual respect, open communication and strategic alignment but must be balanced with professionalism.

Section 6.5 utilises Green and Uhl-Bien's (1995) life cycle and applies this to the headteacher-CoG relationship. The section explains how relationships develop through the stranger, acquaintance and maturity phases and the wide range of factors which serve to accelerate or hinder this evolution. Whilst the innate qualities of each relationship are important, relationship development can also be profoundly affected by external events, which serve to 'stress test' the dyad to either positive or negative effect.

Ultimately, the research suggests that embedding LMX within an organisation can extend beyond the headteacher-CoG dynamic, fostering a governance culture that promotes collaboration and strategic alignment.

6.2 Self-concept and power dynamics within the headteacher-CoG relationship.

6.2.1 Self-concept.

The self-concept 'captures the perception that individuals have of themselves' (Lapointe et al, 2019: 383) and this can reflect a self-realisation of their innate personality ('the chronic self') or that which they exhibit in a workplace setting ('the working self'). Both of these are significant within this context, as the data revealed how some of the participants felt it impossible (or even undesirable) to confine themselves to their 'working self': at times, they needed to reveal their more personal side.

High-quality LMX relationships contribute to a more positive self-concept, enhancing employees' perceptions of their competence, value and engagement in their roles (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Conversely, low-quality LMX relationships can lead to a diminished self-concept, reducing employees' motivation and organisational commitment (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010). LMX assumes that there will be multiple identities (or self-concepts) and that these will inevitably have to be fluid, given how 'exchange' events impact differently on each individual.

Writers on the subject have therefore suggested a multi-layered approach. Individuals start with 'self-concepts', which are 'cognitive structures that can include content, attitudes, or evaluative judgments and are used to make sense of the world, focus attention on one's goals, and protect one's sense of basic worth' (Oyserman & Markus, 1998: 110). These are condensed through 'self-schemas', which are 'knowledge structures about the self in a specific behavioral domain' (Markus & Wurf, 1987: 304), and these are focused further on 'situated identities' (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Lord & Brown, 2001; Lord & Brown, 2004; Hannah et al, 2009), which 'individuals construct in organizations and other settings to give meaning and guidance to their activities' (Epitropaki et al, 2017: 111). Using the example of a headteacher, their self-concept would encompass how they regarded

themselves as an individual, their unique strengths and qualities; their 'self-schema' would be how they identify themselves as a school leader; and their 'situated identities' would be how they saw themselves in that specific post and organisation. LMX studies tend to use three similar levels – individual, relational and collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Johnson et al, 2006; Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord et al, 1999; van Knippenberg et al, 2004) – although, unsurprisingly, the second of these emphasise the influence of relationships on shaping 'self-schemas'.

At the individual level, people 'perceive themselves to be unique and independent entities' (Lapointe et al, 2019: 383), through their innate characteristics, what makes them 'tick' and how these differentiate them from others. At a relational or interpersonal level, the self-concept is derived from 'connections and role relationships with significant others' (Brewer & Gardner, 1996: 84), such as with work colleagues, family members and friends. The nature and purpose of the relationship to a degree defines the self-concept, through each fulfilling the expectations of their dyadic partners and attending to the needs of these partners and improving their relationships with them. At a collective level, self-concept reflects group goals and norms, so as to reflect and focus on the collective welfare and success of the group. In this instance, the collective could refer to the leadership and governance of the school, the wider school community or alternative groups, such as other headteachers and CoGs.

Each of these levels is summarised by Brewer and Gardner (1996: 84) in Table 6.1:

Level of Analysis	Self-Concept	Basis of Self-Evaluation	Frame of Reference	Basic Social Motivation
Individual	Personal	Traits	Interpersonal comparison	Self-interest
Interpersonal	Relational	Roles	Reflection	Other's benefit
Group	Collective	Group prototype	Intergroup comparison	Collective welfare

Table 6.1: Levels of representation of the Self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996: 84).

The self-concept of headteachers and CoGs can potentially be forged through an amalgam of these three levels, in what Brewer and Gardner (1996: 84) term 'the extended self-concept'. By this, they mean that 'the boundaries of the self are redrawn, and the content of the self-concept is focused on those characteristics that make one a 'good' representative of the group or of the relationship' (Brewer and Gardner, 1996: 84). Self-concept is not therefore always derived solely from an individually constructed identity but can be refined to accommodate the needs and desires of the other in the relationship and out of a wish to conform to the expectations and demands of the collective.

Within the research data, it was apparent that all participants possessed a highly developed individual self-concept. This was unsurprising, given that both headteachers and CoGs were experienced and expert professionals, who were in post largely because they – as well as others – believed they possessed the requisite qualities to fulfil their responsibilities. As even a cursory reading of person specifications shows, these are often extensive. A recent candidate brochure for an independent school headteacher position included the following:

> 'The successful candidate will be a charismatic leader … possessing the resilience, flair and energy to take on a major challenge … be a collegiate and collaborative team player, capable of decisive management with an instinctive feel for the correct relationship between the Head and Governors … be a confident and impressive communicator … have enthusiasm … be a humble and kind person with integrity.'
>
> (RSAcademics, 2025)

Whether individuals actually exhibit these qualities is not wholly the point within a discussion of self-concept; what matters is that, within their individual self-concept, they believe they have these qualities. That said, such a list presents a formidable set of skills for headteachers to possess and, given the capacity for self-doubt and insecurity within most of the headteachers interviewed (and others I have known), the gap between the 'ideal' and reality potentially plays into the sense of 'imposter syndrome' that many headteachers feel. The same demands, though, are made of CoGs, although their attributes may be different, the ability to listen, mediate and advise perhaps being more central. An alternative methodology would have been necessary to examine the different identities of each research participant – the individual, the 'self-schema' and the 'situated identity' – but simply awareness of this is helpful to appreciate the layers that comprise self-concept.

Some traits were clearly apparent, however. Headteacher D, in the absence of any support from CoG D, and only limited support from the governing body, relied heavily on his individual self-concept, developed over many years (although, relationally, his self-concept was crafted significantly by the CoGs in his first headship). Headteacher A also appeared to have a strong individual self-concept. This derived from her lengthy period of service, which had meant that, over time, she was now on her fifth CoG and had been involved in the appointment of most of the governing body. She saw herself as expert, decisive and aware of all aspects of the school, internally and externally. However, she revealed a considerable level of insecurity as well and so drew heavily on advice and reassurance offered to her by CoG A. His willingness to listen, counsel and support

proved to be a key addition to her self-concept, thus demonstrating the value of a relational self-concept, which she viewed as vital for her ability to do her job.

This latter example reflects 'the relevance of relational self-identity for LMX', as explored by Chang and Johnson (2010), as the 'propensity to relate' by both Headteacher A and CoG A is judged as 'one indicator of a strong relational self-identity' (Chang & Johnson, 2010: 798). This, in turn, ensures that they 'act in ways that enhance dyadic relationships by considering the welfare of other people and having greater trust in and holding more favorable evaluations of dyadic partners' (Chang & Johnson, 2010: 798). In practice, this means that 'leaders' with strong relational identities place considerable emphasis on the relationship they have with their 'followers' through being motivated to 'initiate and maintain positive relationships, to provide feedback and social support, and to engage in behaviors that fulfil followers' expectations' (Chang & Johnson, 2010: 798).

The terms 'leaders' and 'followers' are placed in inverted commas because self-concepts within the headteacher-CoG relationship are complicated. Whilst the headteachers exhibited 'leader' characteristics most clearly through articulating their dominance and, to an extent, control of the relationship, the CoGs, albeit supportive of the headteachers taking the initiative, were keen to stress their ultimate authority: their ability to remove the headteacher (in conjunction with the governing body). This was referred to explicitly by CoGs A and D. In all but Relationship D, the participants were keen to marginalise any hierarchical instinct, preferring to emphasise the value and regularity of their relational interchanges, many of which they found to be 'interactionally rich', as will be analysed later.

Headteacher C most clearly had a self-concept drawn from the individual, relational and collective layers. During his interview, he outlined how his background, education and experience had all served to shape his identity, values and self-confidence; his highly-developed relationship with CoG C clearly gave him considerable confidence and faith in his own abilities; and his belief in both the governing body and the wider school community – and the reciprocal support he

had received – had meant his self-concept had become so united with that of the school that he declined an offer to consider a position elsewhere.

The extended self-concept of each of the CoGs had a similar variety, although most typically relied more on the collective than the relational. CoGs A and C, as explained above, viewed their self-concept as CoGs in part through the prism of their relationship with their respective head; CoG F revealed how his relationship with Headteacher F refined his self-concept as CoG, especially when it came to personal issues of trust. CoG A, for example, was willing to commit himself to a lengthy weekly meeting with Headteacher A because she herself felt this was necessary as part of her self-concept as headteacher. He was aware that such contact was an impediment to the responsibility expected by the collective to focus on issues of governance and accountability. The other CoGs relied more heavily on their collective layer, regarding their board responsibilities as more significant than their relationship with the headteacher in shaping their self-concept. CoG D's self-concept was almost wholly determined by his role as chair of the board – or a not-for-profit charitable enterprise, as he saw it. Given his individual self-concept was largely task-oriented and the fact he eschewed the relational layer, it was unsurprising that he relied more on the collective exigencies to determine his self-concept. CoGs B, E and H were all very conscious of their responsibilities towards the board and the school and these appeared to be very much in the forefront of their minds when they discussed their role as CoG. They were more cautious when revealing how the relational layer had affected their self-concept – more so certainly than their respective headteacher. This suggests that CoGs find it harder to admit how far the relational layer can impact upon self-concept. For them, it was preferable to view their self-concept resulting from their individual qualities and their collective identity than from their relationship with the headteacher. This was echoed in their discussion of the term 'critical friend'.

Further nuance is provided by Brewer and Gardner (1994) with the terms 'interpersonal attraction' and 'social attraction', suggesting that the relational layer of self-concept can be through personal qualities or from social attributes: in other

words, whom someone is as compared to what they represent. 'Interpersonal attraction' was evident in Relationships A, C and – to an extent – E, although this was more from headteacher to CoG than the other way around. 'Social attraction' was more evident in Relationships B, F, G and H, where there was a sense of personalities being drawn together in pursuit of common, institutional goals as opposed to attraction based on the personal qualities of the individual themselves. Such a divide is rather artificial, however, given that the interactions between dyads were both frequent and complex, often indicating a fusion between personal and institutional concerns.

Research undertaken by Jackson and Johnson (2019) suggests that, regarding the relational and collective levels, the more similar the dyadic partners are, the better their LMX tended to be. However, when it comes to individual self-identity, similarity was negatively related to LMX, as they were more likely to clash and compete within the relationship. When there is more difference between them, they are more likely to fall into complementary roles, one taking a more dominant position and the other acting more like a supporter. Beneficial self-concept, especially at this individual level, is not about being similar or different but how these similarities and differences interact. If it is the case that individuals within a relationship are likely to clash due to being too similar, then an awareness of LMX enables both parties to reach an accommodation so that they can avoid this outcome. This is in part proven by the participants in Relationship C, who were very similar in their self-identity but were also completely aware of that, hence their investment they gave to reflecting on their relationship and willingness to be honest should difficulties arise.

This is perhaps easier to achieve in relationships where the leader and follower roles are more clearly understood. In the headteacher-CoG relationship, these roles are often shared and not always consciously. Where that awareness does exist, it is possible for one or both parties to adapt their self-concept to fit in with that of the other. CoGs A and F most definitely did that: both were former headteachers and both had substantial governance experience but they were

prepared, within that specific relationship, to become more subservient to the personality of the headteacher. In both cases, this was consciously undertaken, largely because their experience gave them confidence to do so, with them having a clear understanding of the role of CoG. In Relationship C, both parties, from the outset, dovetailed their personalities and approaches almost instinctively. There was some conscious decision-making involved but mostly this resulted from a degree of luck and as a by-product of the CoG having been so proactive within the appointment process. There was more potential for disharmony in Relationship H, where both parties shared a similarly strong, commanding and individualistic self-identity. However, they were aware of this, with both willing to accommodate the other in a variety of ways. Headteacher H did not stand in the way of CoG H meeting separately with SLT colleagues and having his own agenda with regard to protecting the school's 'values'; CoG H deferred to Headteacher H in his knowledge of both governance and education, his modesty about his background and experience ensuring that Headteacher H did not feel threatened by CoG H's involvement. To an extent, therefore, this was a relationship where both parties understood the potential clash that could occur through over-similarity in individual self-concept, although the 'solution' was arrived at more through happenstance than design.

Perception is also important, as it is essential for self-concept not just that high LMX exists but that it is *perceived* to exist by the participants within the relationship. One could argue that this was a self-selecting sample, given that all had agreed to participate in the research, but, in all but one of the relationships, it was apparent that there was a high degree of self-reflection regarding their relationship; indeed, several participants said that the research had prompted them to give even more thought to how it was conducted. Headteacher D's indifference about his relationship with CoG D was misaligned with how CoG D perceived it, as they possessed fundamentally different beliefs about the relationship's purpose. The research data therefore suggests that an aligned and accurate perception of the relationship by both parties is also an essential prerequisite for high LMX.

Perception is equally as important when assessing how one specific relationship compares with others. Leader–Member Exchange Social Comparison (LMXSC) refers to an employee's assessment of the quality of their relationship with their leader compared to the relationships their peers have with the same leader. LMXSC thus emphasises the comparative aspect, where employees evaluate their own standing relative to their colleagues. To an extent, this is less important when examining the headteacher-CoG relationship because, in any school, this tends to be unique, with parties being assured that their relationship is unable – or unlikely – to be replicated elsewhere. However, this is not always the case. Headteacher B revealed that, when he first started at School B, the then CoG had a close relationship with the finance director. Although Headteacher B felt he was able to maintain a good working relationship with both individuals, it was his belief that, if there had been a dispute with the finance director, then the CoG would most likely have sided with them against him. In this instance, both the CoG and the finance director left the school soon afterwards and so potential conflict was avoided but it illustrates the danger of negative LMXSC. Headteachers C and H positively encouraged their respective CoGs to conduct relationships with other senior members of staff and the CoGs in return encouraged bipartisan relationships with other governors. LMXSC should be positive in these instances because all parties are aware and consenting. LMXSC can be negative when a suspicion is allowed to develop where one or both parties feel circumvented by the other. Headteachers and CoGs therefore have to be mindful of the impact on LMXSC if alternative relationships are established with a bursar, other governors or executives within a MAT, if the purpose and outcome of these are not consciously shared with each other. Lapointe et al (2019) find that low LMXSC on its own will not necessarily predict the LMX of a relationship but it does impact on the self-concept – both relational and individual – of the participants: in other words, if it is felt the relationship is compromised due to a lack of focus and exclusivity, self-concept will also be compromised.

Lapointe et al (2019) present an additional proposition regarding LMXSC: if an individual's contribution to a relationship is regarded as 'special' or unique in

comparison to their relationship with others, then this impacts positively on the self-concept of the other. For example, Headteacher A's incredibly high regard for CoG A was based in part on the commitment that CoG A showed towards her. He gave up over an hour of his week to speak to her and was prepared to listen to anything she wished to talk about. Headteacher A was aware that CoG A would not do this for anyone else: the exclusivity of his attention made her feel valued and heard. In contrast, Headteacher F, whilst valuing CoG F's advice and mentoring, was conscious that CoG F – as an experienced CoG and CEO of a MAT – conducted similar relationships with several others across the week. He therefore did not regard his relationship as either special or unique. This is illustrated perhaps by the fact that Headteacher A considered CoG A a 'friend' whom she could confide in, whereas Headteacher F was reticent about discussing anything personal or contentious with CoG F.

To that end, Lapointe et al (2019) use the term a 'customised leadership style', which suggests that relationships, to perform at their best, need to be approached in a bespoke fashion. Even though it might appear more equitable for leaders to appear the same in all situations, all followers are different and they appreciate and benefit from adapted styles of leaderships according to their roles, personalities and circumstance. Headteacher D, for instance, spoke fondly of the CoG in his first headship, who took him 'under his wing' when he first took up post. Realising that he was inexperienced, he undertook to mentor him, whereas others, in a similar position, may have merely continued to act as they had done beforehand. At best, self-concept is not therefore a constant but, contained within it, is an ability to react and adapt to a changed environment.

6.2.2 Applying Foucault's conceptualisation of power to the headteacher-CoG relationship.

Whereas some leadership theories can oversimplify power, saying that it is something that leaders either possess or do not, Foucault argues that, rather than

being confined to an individual, it is instead woven into everything: culture, social structures, even language. For Foucault, power is 'a structure of actions … bearing on the actions of those who are free' (Foucault, 1980: 220). By structure of actions, Foucault is referring to the context and circumstance in which an individual or relationship is acting: it is that which effectively creates or confers power, particularly if those involved have the capacity to act freely. To put it another way, instead of power being personal – based on the specific traits of an individual (such as their physical characteristics or innate aspects of their personality) – it is instead a function of structure. Individuals do not possess power as of right: they are powerful because either other actors or the context itself enables them to enjoy and exercise power.

Foucault therefore argues that 'power is everywhere' (Foucault, 1976), in that it can emanate from a large range of potential sources and that these, in turn, confer power – potentially, on an individual or a group or a certain point of view. Applying this perspective to the headteacher-CoG relationship, one can see that, rather than power being exercised within the relationship by one actor or another (or both to an extent), there is a much wider set of factors that influence the distribution of power. Indeed, it recalls my initial consideration of complexity theory as a theoretical lens. As Ladkin and Probert (2019) argue: 'Foucault's assertion that 'power is everywhere' alerts us to the many layers of assumptions, desires, and contingent factors that can come to life when power begins to move' (Ladkin & Probert, 2019: 5). The reaction to the change of Sixth Form uniform in Relationship F illustrates this. Headteacher F certainly possessed a degree of power when he introduced a more formal dress code: this was a practical step within a determined strategy to raise standards within the Sixth Form. However, he faced opposition from within the pupil and parental body, both, in their own way, powerful in themselves and potential threats to Headteacher F's power. Alongside them, CoG F was both a current parent and a former pupil of the school, as well as being chair of the governing body, a former headteacher (at a different school) and CEO of a local MAT. His power, as derived from these sources, was therefore considerable in dealing with Headteacher F. In this

instance, he publicly defended Headteacher F's actions but counselled him privately about his methodology. In discussion, one could appreciate how this was an episode in which power ebbed and flowed between the two of them, subtly but not imperceptibly.

Foucault would label both of them 'subjects' in this regard, which was a term he used to describe whenever the power of an individual is affected by someone or something else. Ladkin and Probert (2019) summarise it thus: 'Every individual operating within a social field will be in some ways subjected to the expectations, norms, historical circumstances, cultural expectations, and institutional arrangements of that field' (Ladkin and Probert, 2019: 5). Foucault's analysis therefore links with that of self-concept, in that only part of it can be explained by the actions or characteristics of an individual. Even prior to conducting the interviews, it was my perception that each headteacher-CoG was governed, at least in part, by external factors, which were often outside the control of the dyad. Whilst individual factors can play an important role, and relational factors are critical, there is a vast array of other factors at work which affect how the relationship is initiated, developed and ultimately concluded and how, in Foucault's terminology, 'sovereigns' turn into 'subjects'.

Figure 6.1 presents an illustration of the factors which can determine power outcomes in leadership relationships. Those affecting leaders and followers have already been explored under the umbrella of self-concept. Historical, Societal and Structural Forces also loomed large in the interview data.

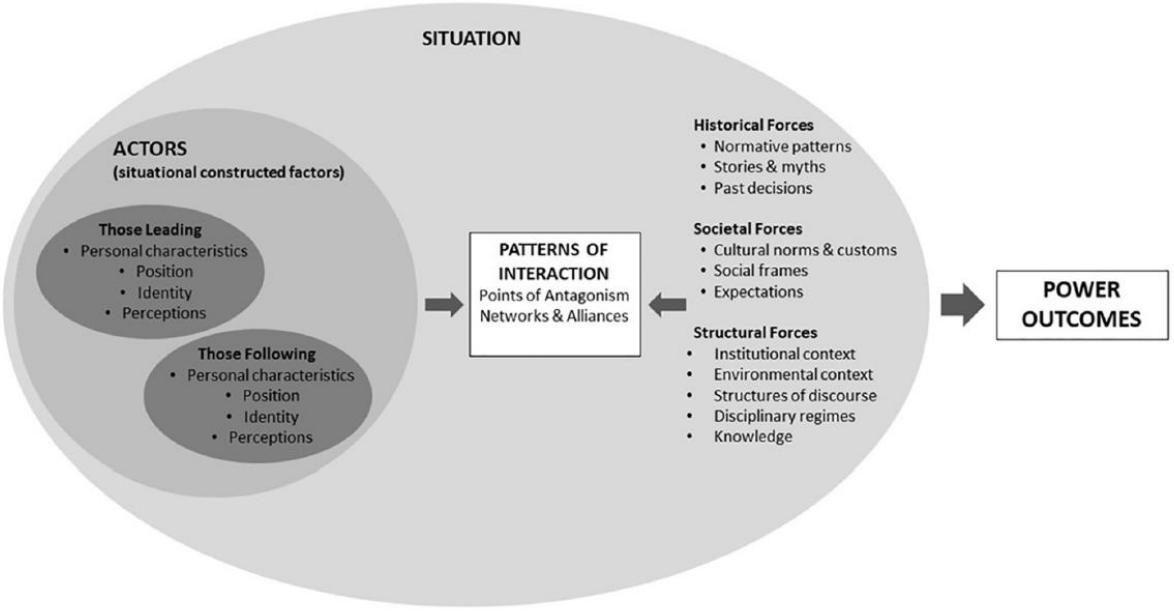

Figure 6.1: Factors influencing power within leadership relations (Ladkin and Probert, 2019: 9).

Historical forces cast a long shadow, whether that be the actions of previous headteachers or CoGs, the current status and composition of the governing body (more significant probably in the independent school sample) or foundational changes (such as a move to academy status or into a MAT). Headteachers B and D both reflected on the rocky start to their tenure and how this took some time to overcome. The pandemic had also, in turn, been disruptive but, rather than proving a negative influence on power, often appeared to strengthen the power of both headteacher and CoG, both within and outside the relationship (although the legacy of the pandemic – staff shortages, for example – were rendering them less powerful). That said, potential threats to power loomed large within most interviews: CoG A was concerned about a dissatisfied governor; Headteacher B about the personal challenges posed by a demanding HR issue regarding a member of the SLT; Headteacher G by the internal resource struggles within the MAT. Included in the diagram are 'stories and myths' and these can be particularly impactful, largely because they precede one or both individuals being in post and, by implication, may be embroidered 'fact' or completely untrue. Due to the lack of transparency – there most likely being no record of what occurred in prior relationships or how previous headteachers and CoGs dealt with the governing

body – these can often be more powerful precisely because newcomers can find themselves 'shadow boxing' prior incumbents (and their perceived legacies). CoG A recognised, for example, that he was Headteacher A's fifth CoG and that, to an extent, he had to fit into the shoes of the much-beloved first; Headteacher G's predecessor was now the CEO of the MAT and it was clear that their former friendship was coming under strain.

Such relationships are also strongly affected by societal forces and expectations. A common thread in the interview data was how little prior knowledge and understanding both headteachers and CoGs admitted to having about the relationship. This did not perturb them greatly at the time because they felt they had a firm idea as to what the relationship was about due to them adopting the normal approach and practice of two executives working together. This sometimes worked out because of the professional background of the CoG. However, referring to what was written about self-concept, complications can arise due to normative customs and perceptions being inappropriate, especially, as LMX theory would suggest, when it comes to role-making and the adoption of a leader/follower identity. In the research sample, the initial moves towards meeting and communicating were largely driven by prior experience of similar (but not identical) relationships. It was apparent that, whilst meeting was important, what was to be discussed – and to what end – was less obvious. Thus the relationship formed on the back of an expectation of what the structure of such a relationship should be – the length of meetings, their frequency, the location – rather than focusing on its substance and purpose. Hence, when asked about the relationship, initial responses tended to conform to these societal expectations rather an in-depth discussion of value or function.

Although this was not addressed specifically within the research questions or interview schedule, societal norms surrounding gender, age and race were evident. The sample included two female headteachers and one CoG, one headteacher and one CoG who were non-white and four relationships where the age gap between the participants was over ten years. There was a gender mix in

Relationships A, E and G and, in some ways, it was noticeable that there was a gentler and slightly more forgiving approach taken between both parties, man to woman and woman to man. In such a small sample, this may have just been down to personality, or a more deferential approach due to age, but the tone of all-male relationships was, to an extent, more 'matey' but also more demanding. Both Headteacher C and CoG C felt their non-white heritage meant that they were able to effect an immediate bond, partly because such a relationship was so unusual in the independent sector. Race was not discussed elsewhere, in part because it remains a societal expectation that postholders in such relationships will be white. Such assumptions inevitably play into instinctive responses, especially in the initial stages of any relationship.

Structural forces relate to those which pertain to the precise context of the relationship. How far each of these is unique came across vividly when conducting the interviews, as even the slightest variation in circumstance had the potential to create a significant dynamic. In Relationship F, for instance, the fact that Headteacher F and CoG F were both parents of pupils at School F – and their children were aware of each other – gave them a connection which I sensed to be potentially awkward. CoG G had a very close connection with previous headteachers – one of them was godfather to her daughter – which made Headteacher G appear more distant and aloof because he neither sought nor wanted a more intimate relationship. In the independent school sample, three of the four CoGs were former pupils of the school, the other was a former independent school headteacher. Each of these variations inevitably alters the 'structural discourse', as the contrasting parameters of experience, knowledge and understanding of the postholders impact on each other.

Headteacher B, for example, was met with an overpowering CoG on first taking up post, who presented himself as the dominant partner in the relationship. Headteacher B admitted that he would have found this very challenging if this CoG had remained in post and, fortunately for him, this was not his first headship and so he could at least contextualise this style of leadership. School B was also

perceived as a prestigious school and to an extent he was intimidated by his new surroundings and the incumbent governors who had appointed him. Such conditions and expectations inevitably shaped the power outcomes of the relationship, especially at the start of his tenure.

Foucault firmly believes that 'knowledge is power' and that power within a relationship can shift according to the provision and withholding of information and whether it is accurate or manipulated. In such a way, informational asymmetry can be a determinant of power in a relationship: if knowledge is inaccurate or incomplete, or held and controlled by one party to the detriment of the other, decision-making will be impaired. The issue of communication – as part of the 'Patterns of Interaction' identified in Figure 6.1 – will be examined in Section 6.3 but it was apparent from the interviews that both parties appreciated that information – and information-sharing – was key to their roles and the relationship. Timely exchange of accurate information was similarly fundamental to the creation of trust, as will also be discussed later.

Foucault therefore suggests leaders need to be conscious of the following. The first is to expect the unexpected, something he called 'indeterminacy': no matter how much leaders try to control matters, things will not always go according to plan, as power is fluid and relational. It is about embracing that uncertainty by focusing on understanding the system itself, by not getting caught up in individual personalities or specific events, and appreciating the history, culture and networks that are at play in any situation and understanding the power dynamics operating beneath the surface. The allocation of power is always changing, depending on who is involved and what is happening around them. Foucault argues that individuals possess the power to influence but those being influenced also have a choice on how they respond. Hence choice, at least to an extent, remains at the heart of power in what he saw as a 'dynamic interplay'.

The second is that leaders are not just 'subject to [our] identity, conscience and self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1994: 331) but also shaped by environment and

circumstance. Leaders inevitably draw in influences from elsewhere in order to become 'better' (or more accepted and supported) leaders. Foucault calls this 'discipline', the way we internalise power structures and end up shaping ourselves according to those expectations. This directly reflects the LMX argument as to how leaders and followers affect each other and, indeed, it was apparent from the interviews that all participants recognised the limit of their power: how they were all, to an extent, subject to forces outside their control. Several of the headteachers were frank about the emotional toll this placed on them, that, despite their self-concept being one of authority and grace under fire, they found it difficult to maintain this demeanour whilst facing considerable challenges to their power from both within and outside the school.

The third is that, instead of trying to dominate, leaders look for ways to align their goals within existing structures, to work with the system through building coalitions and finding common ground. In simple terms, they need to work with the flow of power instead of against it, with the need to become more aware and strategic. Headteacher H certainly realised this when faced with the challenge of an inexperienced but determined new CoG. CoG H was keen to become more involved with school decision-making, seeing himself both as an ally and potential mentor to Headteacher H. Given his experience and the potential threat posed by CoG H, he felt he could – and had to – accommodate his desire to become more involved, skilfully sourcing a mentor from the LA (where he had previously worked) to support him. In so doing, he was demonstrating the Foucauldian precept that leadership is less about understanding power than it is using that understanding in order to navigate potentially adverse situations effectively.

6.2.3 Summary of Section 6.2.

Section 6.2 examines how self-concept takes shape within the headteacher-CoG relationship, looking at how it can develop through individual identity, interpersonal connections and shared roles. It points to the way strong LMX

relationships can support a sense of worth and capability in both headteachers and CoGs. In contrast, when these relationships are weak, feelings of self-doubt and detachment may become more prominent. The chapter stresses that self-concept is shaped by a mix of personal characteristics and interactions with others, drawing on ideas such as self-schemas and roles shaped by context. Interview responses suggest that both headteachers and CoGs tend to have a well-established sense of self, formed through their careers and values. At the same time, their interactions, especially those where CoGs act as allies or sounding boards, play a major part in reinforcing identity and purpose. The idea of the extended self-concept is also introduced, where individuals adapt how they see themselves to align with the needs and expectations of the wider school community. This dynamic reflects the ongoing negotiation between personal identity and institutional responsibilities.

Drawing on Foucault's perspective on power, the section considers how influence operates not just through personal authority but through the conditions surrounding the relationship. It shows how prior leadership patterns, cultural expectations and differences in governance shape how authority is shared and experienced. These broader influences help explain how self-concept evolves in leadership roles, offering a way to think about power and identity as connected rather than separate forces in the context of this relationship.

6.3 How and why communication patterns and processes within headteacher-CoG relationships can be 'interactionally rich'.

This section looks at the role of dialogical communication within the headteacher-CoG relationship: specifically, what is communicated, how it is communicated and what the motivations of the participants are to communicate. There are two reasons to examine this in such detail. First, during the interviews, it became clear that several of the relationships had developed complex and highly developed patterns of communication. The act of communication was important in and of

itself in that the moment of exchanging information enhanced the participants' perception of each other; however, the unspoken communication was equally as powerful, at least potentially, as confidence, trust and commitment began to flourish. This is summed up by Rogers and Escudero (1996):

> 'Communication is seen as the life-giving, social-sustaining essence of relationships, the interactive process by which relationships come into being, take shape, are built up or torn down in the ongoing ebb and flow of their evolutionary course. Viewed from this perspective, communication is not of a singular nature, but a joint, social adventure, with relationships continually in process, malleable and changeable, tranquil at times, and at times, tenuous.'
>
> (Rogers & Escudero, 1996: 3)

6.3.1 The determinants of 'interactional richness'.

Barry and Crant (2000) explore how dyadic relationships develop within organisational contexts and why it is that communication varies in efficiency and effectiveness over time. Their approach seeks to bring together disparate but related theoretical perspectives, specifically communications richness (e.g. Daft and Lengel, 1986), relational communication (e.g. Stohl and Redding, 1987), interpersonal attribution (e.g. Fletcher and Fincham, 1991) and social expectancy (e.g. Jones, 1990).

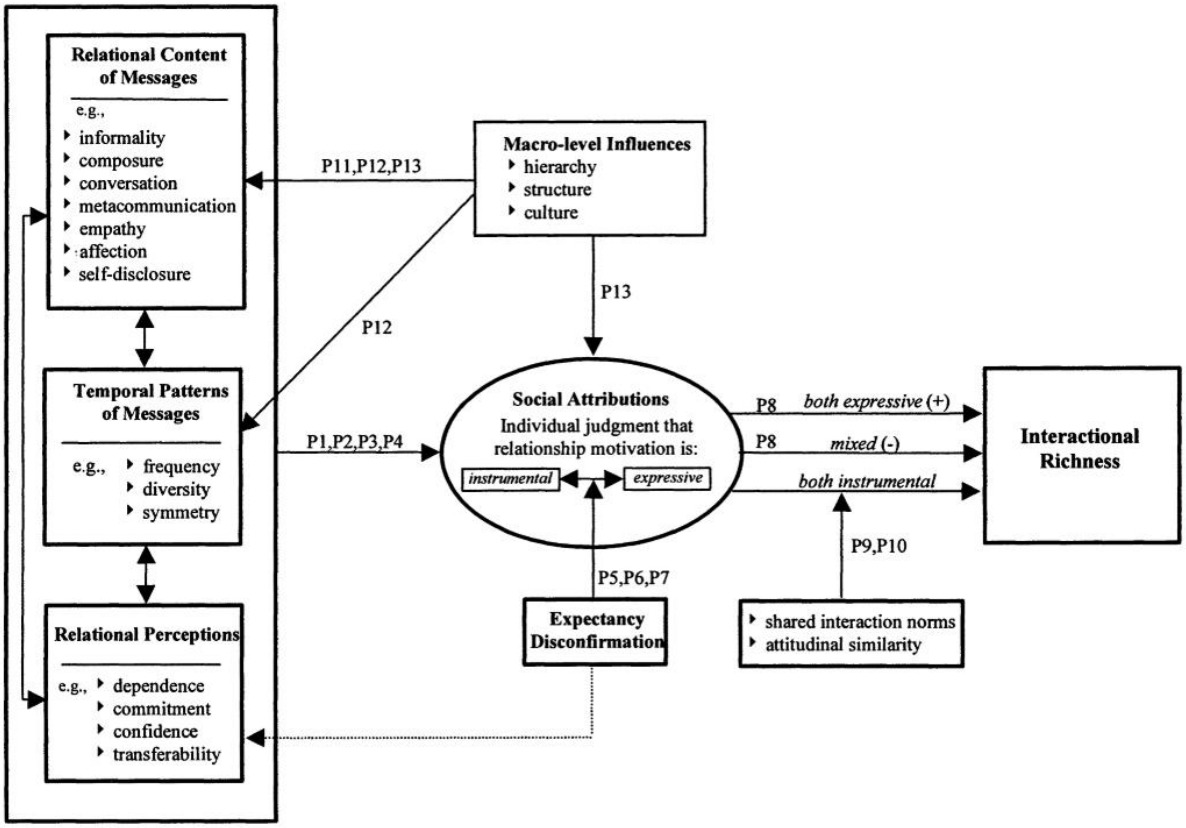

Figure 6.2: The determinants of interactional richness (Barry and Crant, 2000: 650).

They depict a framework which sets out the key factors and influences at work in dyad communication. This is shown in Figure 6.2 (Barry and Crant, 200: 650). There are five principal elements to this framework. The left side of the model are the 'antecedents [which] reflect the interplay between interaction and cognition that is the hallmark of relational communication theory' (Barry and Crant, 2020: 649). In the centre, are the principles of social attribution 'to analyze how dyad members interpret and respond to the motivations of interaction partners' (Barry and Crant, 2020: 649). Below this is a reference to social expectancy theory, 'which focuses on how interaction patterns confirm or violate an individual's prior expectations' (Barry and Crant, 2020: 649) and above is the perspective of structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984), which assesses how far macro-level aspects of the organisation impact upon the social-cognitive processes of the relationship. The model ultimately determines the extent of 'interactional richness' within the relationship, which is a fusion and extension of the theories of

information richness (Daft and Lengel, 1984) and media richness (Sitkin et al, 1992).

Information richness theory, as first articulated by Daft and Lengel (1984, 1986), 'described the linkages between organisational context, the information-carrying capacity of data and managerial communication behaviour' (Barry and Crant, 2020: 649). It concluded that there were three facets to communication within workplace relationships: the information that was being communicated; how it was being communicated; and how the individuals concerned regarded – and reacted – to both the message and the medium. 'A communication event is relatively 'rich' when the act of communication provides substantial new understanding' (Barry and Crant, 2020: 649). Through a summation of these distinct aspects of a relationship, they defined the construct of 'interactional richness' as follows:

> 'The extent to which communication within an interacting dyad at a given point in time is efficient (high in symbolic content), coordinated (characterized by synchronous interaction), and accurate (symbolic meaning is shared and appropriately interpreted). Interactional richness is a characteristic of the relationship itself that is derived from the pattern of interpersonal experiences and communication characteristics that unfold over time.'
>
> (Barry and Crant, 2020: 651)

6.3.2 Antecedents of relational development.

Within the relational communication perspective, the act of communication – the method as well as the message – is regarded as a process through which individuals within a relationship define its qualities and meaning. In Figure 6.2, three 'antecedents' or components of communication are defined, with some examples given, and each of these warrant analysis through use of the interview data.

Whilst defining and describing these aids our understanding, in practice, of course, all are interrelated and interwoven, each provoking change and development in the other. Barry and Crant argue that 'exchanges endowed with relational content may yield positive relational perceptions' hence 'communication patterns accelerate relationship development through uncertainty reduction as dyad members communicate more often (frequency), more equitably (symmetry), and over a wider range of subjects (diversity)' (Barry and Crant, 2000: 653). In turn, relationship development is similarly sped up through confident inter-relational perceptions.

6.3.3 Relational content of messages.

Each of the participants was asked about how they communicated within their dyad and how this had developed over time and their responses reveal the shifting priorities of the relationship, as each evolves through the stages described in Section 6.4.

Barry and Crant argue that 'over time, interactions move from tentative, exploratory forms of communication through stages where individuals exercise less caution, reveal more personality, become more friendly and casual, and eventually come to predict and interpret each other's behavior rapidly and accurately, with sensitivity to nuance' (Barry and Crant, 2020: 651). Within Figure 6.2, they suggest seven indicators of such change – informality, composure, conversation, metacommunication, empathy, affection and self-disclosure – and each of these will be discussed in the light of the interview responses.

Informality

Given the relaxation in professional standards, apparent in many workplace environments in recent years, it is unsurprising that nearly all the relationships exhibited an informality regarding the language and tone of their exchanges. Most

relaxed was Relationship C, where both parties spoke animatedly about how their contact with each other veered quite happily from the serious to the light-hearted. Headteacher C said how 'convivial' their 'chats' were (as he saw them), which he thought was 'lovely'. CoG C echoed this sentiment, believing a degree of informality led to an ease of approach which inevitably increased the level of trust between them, something he saw as vital to the relationship's success. This is not to say their exchanges appeared irrelevant or unrelated to school – far from it – but, for CoG C in particular, maintaining a level of informality in their discussions made it easier to deal with more significant challenges when they arose, as the two were used to talking frankly and honestly.

Less formal patterns of communication encouraged less formal messaging, in not just content but also use of vocabulary and grammar. Some relationships used WhatsApp to send links to articles they had found interesting, updates on cricket scores, news about holidays or even memes. Such informality inculcates a sense of shared understanding and culture in what might be regarded as an 'inner sanctum', in a relationship which, viewed from the outside, usually possesses at least a veneer of order and formality.

Composure

Composure refers to a communication pattern where there is a lack of 'apprehension, anxiety or worry about the communication encounter' (Burgoon & Hale, 1987). This was particularly so in relationships which had emerged from their 'stranger' phase, where it was apparent that participants had become more confident and assured about their contact with each other. Headteacher B is an interesting example because, even though CoG B was his third CoG, he had had to adapt his approach to communication due to the different styles of each CoG. His first CoG was largely an absent figure, who principally required updating on school news and events, leaving anything more strategic to the headteacher and his senior team. The second CoG was more high-powered professionally and intense and expectant that Headteacher B would be able to run the school without any

particular recourse to him. This led Headteacher B to become wary about 'opening up' as he would be unsure as to how any request for help or advice would be received.

CoG B was therefore something of a departure, in that he wished to be closely involved with Headteacher B but from a place of genuine support rather than cold scrutiny. This is attributed to his personal skills and professional background, him having served in academic and medical posts prior to retirement. Headteacher B felt that this gave him a level of administrative and financial acumen on which he could draw but also a substantial level of organisational literacy, enabling him to understand the parameters within which he was able to operate and the limits of capacity that were open to him.

The calm, measured and largely supportive approach of CoG B was therefore mirrored in the composed nature of Headteacher B's reaction. This was the case in the majority of the relationships, demonstrating how the more successful were those in which the creation of trust and confidence enabled two-way communication to become as free-flowing and frictionless as possible.

Conversation

Conversation translates to aspects of discussion that lie outside its principal purpose: what could be described as 'small talk'. CoG F viewed such interactions as essential, in line with his belief that the CoG's role was partly that of coach. Within meetings, he therefore always asked Headteacher F about his welfare and wellbeing, conscious not to be content with the answer 'OK', in order to see if he, or those around him, required more support. He believed there was a personal dimension to their relationship, not least due to the fact that their children were of similar ages, and therefore discussion often drifted into talking about hobbies and holidays. For him, such moments of 'conversation' were 'deliberate' 'because it's about understanding what's important to the head and what they have got in their

lives because everybody's got a life outside of work and it's understanding what that is and how that might influence him'.

Interestingly, Headteacher F was more reticent in celebrating these more informal exchanges, believing it was best to keep such interactions away from the relationship. Such unease was reflected in the responses several of the participants gave to the question on the term 'critical friend'. Whilst some embraced the idea of friendship in the relationship (whilst disagreeing on how this was defined) – 'small talk' being a by-product of this – others expressed alarm at the idea of the two being regarded as 'friends'. CoG E said this was his principal concern when he became CoG, as he had seen relationships where the headteacher and CoG had been too close and this was to the detriment of the school. However, on analysing such concerns, it seems that these were more to do with how the relationship *appeared* to others, with headteachers in particular worried that a close relationship might, in some way, reflect badly on their professionalism, autonomy and, potentially, their ability.

Metacommunication

Metacommunication equates to the hidden subtext that exists within the conduct and framing of communication within the relationship. The significance of metacommunication was perhaps most clearly shown in Relationship H, which had several unique aspects. First, Headteacher H had previously served as a LA advisor, in which capacity he had been responsible for governor training. Although he had not been a CoG, he had greater insight into the role than many other first-time headteachers. For example, he understood the CoG's role in headteachers' performance reviews, enabling him to develop more of a 360° view as to how the CoG would evaluate his performance and what he needed to do to be rated highly. Secondly, CoG H was the most open and honest of all the CoGs interviewed about his lack of prior experience and was therefore keen to seek advice on what he should do. There was therefore considerable awareness on both sides as to what was required to create a successful relationship and also a willingness to be

reflective and adaptable. Headteacher H recalled that he specifically instructed CoG H on how to perform his responsibilities, outlining, for example, the questions he needed to ask in preparation for the forthcoming inspection.

CoG H felt his relationship with Headteacher H should reflect the style of mentoring he undertook in his own business. He saw himself as a coach, which meant the relationship's structure, and the messaging within it, should reflect his desire to be supportive of Headteacher H's development and be emblematic of a culture of honesty and transparency, which, in turn, would serve as a model for relationships throughout the school. This approach derived from his own experiences growing up, when he admits he struggled 'a lot' and that he therefore wanted 'a nice culture', 'for people to feel good about themselves' and that he 'believes in kindness in everything'. He therefore sought to establish a relationship with Headteacher H that was not just supportive in itself but could be seen by others as an exemplar of a supportive relationship to be employed elsewhere in the school.

A complete contrast to this perspective was seen in Relationship D. CoG D neither wanted a close relationship with Headteacher D nor felt it was appropriate. His view was that their respective roles should be clearly delineated into that of Chair and CEO and that contact should be professional, devoid of personal or social concerns and occur only when required. This he felt was in keeping with the 'separation of powers', which enabled the headteacher to be accountable to the governing body. Through limiting contact and avoiding 'conversation' (as defined above), he would argue that both of them were fulfilling their organisational responsibilities, the lack of communication effectively illustrating the CoG's incorruptibility.

Headteacher D's view of the relationship presented a contrasting perspective. On the one hand, he accepted CoG D's position and acknowledged that CoG D's skills and personality were such that a close, personal relationship was unlikely. He praised his ability to carry out the duties of a CoG outside his relationship with the

headteacher. He also said that the relationships he had with others on the governing body in part mitigated the lack of one with CoG D. However, given his previous experience of successful CoG relationships, he realised the gap that had been created by him only having minimal contact with CoG D. This was most clearly shown when he suffered a medical emergency, leading him to contact CoG D to request a period of leave. The brevity – and perceived coldness – of the response only served to confirm a degree of detachment that he felt not just from CoG D but also from School D (and, indeed, his own career – the episode serving to precipitate his early retirement).

It was rewarding that several participants remarked at the end of their interviews how they had enjoyed having the opportunity to reflect upon the relationship, which indicated the value of metacommunication and, in some ways, how rarely it is recognised and understood.

Empathy

The involvement of empathy, and an allied factor, affection, could be regarded as problematic within this relationship. Some of the participants clearly felt awkward when questions alluded to a personal connection, becoming distinctly uncomfortable when it was suggested that this was somehow akin to friendship. This was for several reasons but principally because it gave the impression that it was inappropriate within a professional relationship, as it would impede the ability of the CoG to call the headteacher to account. This relates to the macro-influences shown in Figure 6.2. It was therefore seen as important that there was a degree of dispassionate distance between the two, not just so that the CoG could scrutinise the headteacher effectively but also so that the headteacher would not somehow be lulled into a false sense of security through an overly close relationship: after all, it was usually within the governing body's remit to dismiss the headteacher.

It soon became apparent, however, during some of the interviews, that some relationships displayed significant levels of empathy and affection. It has already been explained how Relationship C almost immediately formed a close bond, in part based on their shared values and personal background. Even they were unprepared, though, for the challenges they were to face early in the relationship, when the school had to deal with several unconnected pupil fatalities. CoG C felt it was essential for him to provide comfort and support to Headteacher C during what were extremely emotional and stressful events over a prolonged period. He felt he was in a better position to offer that support than would a mentor or counsellor as he was 'really embedded in the school and knows it very well and knows all the different interest groups'. His commitment was such that, on hearing of one of the deaths, he left a family social function late on a Friday evening, in order to help and support Headteacher C, as he 'wanted to come into school to help out'. It was indicative of him and his relationship with Headteacher C that his first thoughts were about his welfare and how he could help, understanding how difficult and demanding the situation was for the headteacher.

CoG E was also able to display considerable empathy when Headteacher E was ill with Covid-19 and away from school, whilst a complicated HR situation was developing within her senior leadership team. This was early on in their relationship and, up to this point, their contact had been largely transactional. When she sought advice from CoG E, she became emotional and began crying down the phone. She was embarrassed about her conduct and was concerned that CoG E would regard this as weak and inappropriate. In fact, CoG E displayed considerable empathy and reassured her that the matter could be deferred until another time and she should focus on her recovery instead. Headteacher E became tearful in the interview remembering the incident, moved by the level of understanding shown by CoG E and slightly shocked that he should have been so warm and tender in his concern. It was clear, therefore, that some participants displayed remarkably high degrees of empathy and yet were determined at other times to diminish their significance.

Affection

The biggest sticking point within the interviews was when it came to addressing the issue of friendship. Some refused to accept the notion, believing this was unprofessional and inappropriate; others accepted that friendship did exist but this was qualified, such as saying they were 'a friend to the school' or that they were 'friends but not mates'. A few were prepared to go further, Headteacher A being particularly effusive in her affection for CoG A.

This level of affection was unique amongst the responses and was perhaps indicative of the fact that CoG A was Headteacher A's fifth CoG and she had been instrumental in his appointment. She had also been in post for sixteen years and so was in a confident enough position within the school to feel so comfortable with the CoG. The emotion that comes through the vocabulary is interesting and suggests a degree of neediness, which was perhaps reflected in the fact that she felt it necessary to speak with CoG A at least once a week. CoG A appeared to concur with that judgement when he implied that their regularity of contact was necessary because Headteacher A required considerable reassurance, despite her length of tenure. He then went on to say how he would have preferred less contact and greater focus on strategic planning: in other words, a little more professional distance. Affection can therefore be a powerful ingredient within the relationship, and highly valued by its participants, but it can become an impediment when it is seen as a symptom of a lack of confidence or insecurity.

Self-Disclosure

Within the headteacher-CoG relationship, there will always tend to be a reluctance, certainly to begin with, for the headteacher to address certain matters with the CoG for fear of being judged adversely, such as if the headteacher had made a mistake or a complaint had been made. Headteacher B, for example, admitted that, even though he had been a headteacher for 15 years, at two different schools, he was finding the job more 'stretching' than ever but, similar to

points made under Composure above, he felt able to disclose this to CoG B. He did this through picking up the phone and saying 'look, I'm stuck' or 'I've made a mistake and I'm not sure how to get out of this' in the knowledge that CoG B would give him 'excellent advice'. He acknowledged that such honest self-disclosure was not always easy but the 'personal qualities' of CoG B facilitated this. This was because he considered CoG B had developed wisdom through having to deal with 'incredibly challenging' situations in his own career. As a result, he provided a 'helpful sense of proportion', encouraging him not to focus on the one decision he may have got wrong but on the many he had got right. Interestingly, Headteacher B felt such advice had more value due to the unique position of CoG B, as he was one step removed from the school (as Headteacher B saw it) but also not a complete outsider, who would be unable to understand the context and personnel with whom he was having to deal.

As with Headteacher E's disclosure, such anecdotal evidence is incredibly powerful. As some participants said, it is often an expectation for headteachers to display a 'thick skin' and be resilient when facing stressful situations. Headteacher F, for example, admitted to being 'very thick-skinned' but had his own way of dealing with things, which 'mainly involves putting on a pair of trainers, AirPods in and going for a run [which is] just how I churn things in my head'. However, he then went on to admit that, on being questioned by CoG F about a controversial decision he had made, he was prepared to let his guard down and honestly reflect, in tandem with the CoG, about what he had done and how he might have done it differently. His willingness to self-disclose in this instance he attributed to CoG F's ability to 'depersonalise some of it because it becomes [about] the organisation and the way the organisation is set up'. Self-disclosure thus becomes as much about the CoG's skills in enticing the headteacher to open up, as well as the headteacher's courage to reveal their vulnerability.

6.3.4 Temporal message patterns.

Having considered the specific and individual elements of communication, one can move to determining broader patterns of contact based on repeated interactions of each dyad. Gabarro (1990), in a not dissimilar model to the LMX framework, argued that workplace dyads proceed through four stages – orientation, exploration, testing and stabilisation – and one can see how that translates to the way in which communication patterns are established (or temporal message patterns, as Barry and Crant (1990) call them).

Within their framework, they suggest examples of how such patterns can be viewed in practice, which can be adjudged through their overriding perspective:

> 'Relationship development is facilitated to the extent that dyad members interact often, communicate on a variety of subjects, possess reasonably equivalent access to whatever communication methods are employed, and experience outcomes of interaction that do not notably favour one dyad member over the other.'
>
> (Barry and Crant, 2000: 652)

Frequency

Their first suggested feature within dyad communication patterns is the frequency of contact. Within the interviews, although there was a consensus that the primary form of communication between the participants should be a formal, in-person meeting, there was no specific model as to the frequency of such meetings. Relationships C, E, F and H, at an early stage of the relationship, decided upon convening a regular meeting, which would occur every fortnight for approximately an hour, usually in-person and at school. In interview, the participants were quite vague as to why this pattern was established, giving the impression that it happened that way because that was largely how it had been done in other relationships they had experienced (or been aware of) and provided a reasonable and manageable level of contact for both parties. However, they all recognised that it was important for them to meet and that, for the relationship to function

effectively, meetings needed to be fairly frequent and, as far as possible, regular, with specific times being set aside in diaries to bring this about. There was a realisation that too many meetings could become overwhelming and so a limit was placed on the timing by some, more out of concern for the headteacher's time than for the CoG's. The desire for meetings to be in-person was also stressed, with CoG E, for example, feeling that the start of his relationship with Headteacher E was stifled by the fact they had to meet online due to the pandemic.
Given that not all the relationships met so frequently shows how much this regularity of contact can be regarded as significant when assessing their overall richness. This is not to suggest that frequency is everything: indeed, Relationship A met over the phone on a weekly basis (and at other times in-between) and yet their relationship had not developed as rapidly as others. This was because their interactions remained largely confined to operational matters, with the CoG acting as a sounding-board to the headteacher's day-to-day concerns. Relationship B met less regularly than fortnightly and yet the headteacher in this instance felt that their meetings were very impactful, largely due to the attention given to them by the CoG, who not only devised an agenda but also issued a follow-up email as well.

Relationships D and G met infrequently: in CoG D's eyes, this was only necessary when there was something specific that needed dealing with (for example, a complaint) or when he happened to be visiting School D (as he lived some distance away). In not meeting frequently, it was apparent that each relationship remained grounded in transactional concerns, with one participant in each case (Headteacher D and CoG G) acknowledging the limited scope and impact of their interactions.

Diversity

Barry and Crant (2000) also suggest diversity as a variable of meeting patterns, by which they mean the variety of subjects that are discussed at meetings. As stated above, Relationship A, whilst meeting very regularly, limited their discussions

largely to short-term operational matters. This was largely at the behest of Headteacher A and, although he was largely supportive, something of a frustration for CoG A. Other participants prided themselves on the breadth of issues that were discussed at their meetings and, indeed, how some encounters were not necessarily formal meetings in any case, with CoGs F and H, for example, preferring an informal walk around the school.

At the outset of most of the relationships, most meetings appear to have been about operational concerns, effectively settling the newcomer into the post. Headteacher C, for example, had told CoG C that he was keen for them to meet every week, to update the CoG on how he was getting on; similarly, Headteacher H said to CoG H that he wished to report back every fortnight. The headteacher in these instances was therefore keen for the CoG to be on hand to offer advice or respond to any issues – and also to be aware of the positive impact they were making in their first weeks in post (Headteacher H certainly saw this as a personal marketing opportunity). Even though some of the relationships were still quite new (i.e. less than two years since inception), that approach lasted only a few months, as topics of discussion drifted into other areas.

Some relationships appear to have begun in-depth discussions about strategy almost immediately. Relationship C, having already bonded closely within the appointment process and in the lengthy interregnum period, immediately embarked on a series of strategic initiatives and regarded their ongoing discussions as the key driver in bringing these about. External imperatives also impacted on meeting agendas: for example, the pandemic, and the almost immediate closure of schools, meant that contact between some headteachers and CoGs reached a new level of urgency and complexity. CoG B acknowledged how the calm and delineated conversations he had had with Headteacher B became more sporadic, in-depth and wide-ranging during the early stages of lockdown. The complexion of Relationship H changed due to the complete rebuild of the school and the ensuing logistical challenges. In both these instances, the CoG realised the vital role they had to play in, one, supporting the headteacher

and, two, protecting the wider interests of the school. In discussion with the participants, it was apparent that the parameters of both relationships had not shrunk back to their former state now that the 'crises' were over. The fact that the scope of each relationship had been transformed out of necessity had led to a permanent shift in their own perception about what was on- and off-limits in terms of the focus of their interactions.

The diversity of headteacher-CoG exchanges also came across when the participants discussed the more informal aspects of their relationships. Both Headteacher C and CoG C recounted how their relationship had had an informal – and, to a significant extent, personal – dimension almost from the outset. They saw in each a kindred spirit in terms of their values and beliefs, engendered in part by their sharing a similar ethnicity, upbringing and educational background. They enjoyed a shared love of cricket. Prior to his arrival at School C, the two met for dinner on two occasions (accompanied by spouses) and they contacted each other – by WhatsApp – whether that be about school matters or the score in the cricket. Both participants had no hesitation in terming their relationship – even in its early days – as a form of friendship and felt this was not incompatible with having a professional work relationship. Relationship F also felt able to discuss matters, such as sport and holidays, with each other and Relationship E said that, over time, they had realised that they shared a love of gardening and 'The Archers'. In these latter examples, there was some hesitation about admitting to such exchanges, almost as if they suggested an improper and inappropriate level of intimacy.

This was replicated in other participants, who said they preferred to limit the parameters of discussion within the relationship. Headteacher G, for example, was adamant in keeping his discussions with CoG G to school business only. This was despite him admitting that he was finding the job increasingly stressful and challenging. However, he felt it would be inappropriate to 'reach out' to CoG G for support, preferring instead to deal with such difficulties alone. It was interesting, therefore, to hear CoG G's lament as to how her relationship with Headteacher G

was less intimate than those she had had with his predecessors. She felt she had made herself available for Headteacher G to confide in but accepted that such openness was not necessarily his style.

Symmetry

This last comment reflects on Barry and Crant's last example of a temporal message pattern, that of symmetry within the relationship, or how far 'the mechanisms of exchanges and distribution of communication outcomes are balanced, rather than skewed, between dyad members' (Barry and Crant, 2000: 652). Within the more advanced relationships, it became clear that both partners felt they possessed agency to take the initiative in communicating and, where they wished, to respond honestly and candidly. Such confidence was particularly evident within relationships which utilised social media platforms to interact. Relationship C would often exchange articles or news items they had read through WhatsApp to highlight new ideas or suggest potential local contacts to each other, revealing a flexibility and lightness of touch regarding which party was responsible for agenda-setting. The informality of this communication channel can thus provide the relationship with an alternative approach to the more formal conventions and behaviours apparent in telephone calls, face-to-face meetings and even email.

Symmetry was also perceivable in relationships which encouraged informal social contact outside of established structures. Headteacher B commented on how he often met up with CoG B prior to school events, which afforded both of them an opportunity to engage with each other on a more informal basis. CoG B had also invited Headteacher B to his home for dinner and their respective wives were also in contact with each other. Even though Headteacher B recorded how he sometimes found CoG B intimidating in board meetings, it could be argued that the symmetry of the relationship was corrected through additional interactions outside more formal settings. Although this is not necessarily the case, such

interactions are far less likely to occur in state-funded settings, largely due to differences in culture and approach.
Greater symmetry can therefore be regarded as a by-product of frequent contact and a varied range of exchanges, all of which underscore a relationship which inspires trust and confidence.

6.3.5 Relational perceptions.

The third group of Barry and Crant (2000)'s antecedents concern how the relationship is viewed by the dyad and how each participant views the other. 'Perception' is the key word here because an individual's reaction to a relationship with another is not based on the innate qualities of them or the other but on how each of them is *perceived* by the other. In other words, a headteacher or CoG may be regarded as trustworthy and effective – and indeed, they may think that of themselves – but it is only the perception of the other in the relationship that counts.

It also matters how they perceive the relationship. The interviews revealed that, whilst there was a realisation that the relationship was important and potentially of value, there was a lack of full understanding about how it functioned and how it should be initiated and developed. Figure 6.2 suggests four examples through which this can be examined.

Dependence

Headteachers, certainly when new in post, may rely heavily on the CoG. Headteacher D, for example, remembered that, at the start of his first headship, the CoG saw it as his responsibility to induct him into the school, acting as a mentor to headship as well as to the specific post. Relationship C also quickly formed into a close and interdependent relationship, something which both parties valued. However, this dependence is not a given, especially when perhaps either a

new headteacher or CoG is entering into a relationship whose pattern is already well established. Headteacher G, for example, did not seek to initiate a closer relationship with CoG G when he stepped up from deputy to headteacher, preferring instead to depend on other governors, senior staff and executive officers at the MAT.

Commitment

Commitment is linked to dependence: whereas dependence can be translated as motivation provided by the relationship, commitment is that inspired by the individual. Within the headteacher-CoG relationship, this is naturally expected, as the CoG is the headteacher's 'boss' and so the headteacher will always be motivated to connect with them. However, there is a range of response, from dutiful linkage to enthusiastic embrace. Headteacher D's commitment to CoG D was limited but he appreciated CoG D's expertise on governance and policymaking and so connected to him for those reasons, whereas Headteacher C's willingness to connect with CoG C – and vice-versa – was based on significant mutual trust and the enjoyment of each other's company.

Confidence

Confidence derives from trust and this will be examined in greater detail in Section 6.4. Trust has many roles within the communication process. Although trust is not a prerequisite for more transactional levels of communication, as relationships develop in functionality and become more intimate, it becomes more significant as a catalyst and accelerant for further and more confident contact.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the availability of alternative relationships. In some schools, certainly those in the independent sector, the headteacher-CoG relationship is unique and, whilst there may be additional relationships of value,

none possess the same importance or status. Forming a strong bond with the bursar or finance director, for example, can never compensate for having a weaker connection with the CoG.

Relationships G and H were already losing something of their uniqueness when the participants were interviewed. Headteacher G felt he needed to draw upon allies within the LGB in order to assert himself in budgetary and strategic negotiations with the MAT. He did not feel that CoG G, whom he believed was likely to step down soon, had the necessary skills to do this and so he looked to a new generation of governors to support him. Both Headteacher H and CoG H encouraged each other to seek additional – rather than alternative – relationships, with Headteacher H meeting regularly – and separately – with the Vice-CoG and CoG H making similar arrangements with members of the SLT. This latter instance was regarded as supportive of the headteacher-CoG relationship and not somehow a threat to it.

6.3.6 Expressive and instrumental attributions.

In the centre of Figure 6.2 appear 'attributions of motivation for participating in and maintaining the relationship mediate between relational antecedents and the development of interactional richness within a given dyad' (Barry and Crant, 2000: 653). Barry and Crant are thus suggesting that 'social attribution processes' determine how far the relational antecedents enable a dyad to become interactionally rich. These attribution processes derive from classical attribution theory, which suggests that factors which cause relationships to be as they are split into two: 'internal' attributions, which are located within the perceiver, and 'external' attributions, which are based in the perceiver's environment (Heider, 1958). Barry and Crant adapted these to the workplace environment, preferring the terms 'expressive' and 'instrumental' attributions.

Expressive attributions 'refer to beliefs that the relationships exists primarily because the parties derive emotional satisfaction from it' (Barry and Crant, 2000: 654) and, in contrast, instrumental attributions 'are made when the parties are seen as motivated to maintain the relationship to fulfil role demands, meeting organisational obligations or otherwise make progress toward organisationally relevant goals' (Barry and Crant, 2000: 654). A similar distinction exists in other theories regarding motivation, with some writers, such as Clark and Mills (1993) insisting that individuals are only ever motivated by one factor at any one time. Other writers, though, disagree, believing that it is possible to observe relationships where both expressive and instrumental attributions exist to some degree.

Barry and Crant (2000) therefore arrived at a series of propositions (shown as P1 to P13 in Figure 6.2), which describe the interrelationship between the relationship antecedents and each of these attributions. These can be summarised through a series of arguments.

The first is that the more highly developed and 'rich' each of the antecedents of relational development are, the greater the level of expressive attributions and the lower the level of instrumental attributions. In other words, communication within the headteacher-CoG relationship, at its inception, is largely determined via circumstance and context, where an ultimately 'interactionally rich' relationship is shaped through the initial antecedents becoming highly developed, intense and organically co-created by the participants. It may be the case that instrumental attributions continue to have a role but expressive attributions will be determinative.

The second focuses on the role of expectancies, which 'are judgements and predictions about the behaviour of others and the social context within which that behaviour occurs' (Jones, 1990, Trope, 1986). The first argument is therefore about the behaviours exhibited within the relationship – and where those behaviours are derived from – and the second is about the expectations

surrounding those behaviours. The suggestion is that 'confirmed' expectancies regarding the messaging and patterns of the relationship are likely to enhance it; 'disconfirmed' expectancies, on the other hand, may harm it, as it will lead participants to revise their original expectancy. However, the reverse can also be true: a relationship may be harmed if a negative expectancy is confirmed and improved if it is disconfirmed. Relationship E, for example, became considerably closer when CoG E surpassed Headteacher E's expectancy about how he would react to her becoming upset over the phone when she was ill. Barry and Crant also argue disconfirmation is more likely to engender a change in attributions when they are expressively motivated. This was certainly the case with Relationship E, where the apparent shift in CoG E's motivation, following his empathetic intervention when Headteacher E was unwell (him having stated how he sought to eschew a personal connection), impacted so significantly on Headteacher E because it represented a shift from instrumental attribution, which had largely defined the relationship hitherto.

The third is that relationships are more likely to be interactionally rich when both parties share expressive attributions about a relationship and less likely when they diverge in their attributions. This proposition effectively enables us to predict more and less successful relationships. The most successful relationships, certainly in terms of how they communicate with each other (in other words, how the relationship 'works') are those where both parts of the dyad share expressive attributions. Headteacher C and CoG C demonstrated this clearly through their effusive commitment to each other and the relationship and their fulfilment of the antecedents explained above. Headteacher G and CoG G also proved this as, although their relationship was largely governed by instrumental attributions – they met only when they needed to, which was largely a satisfactory arrangement for both parties – theirs was a position they held in common. There was a dysfunction at the heart of Relationship D, as CoG D's communication behaviour was wholly determined by instrumental attributions. Headteacher D, however, in the relationships he had had with four CoGs previously, had always sought to be more engaged and expressive. His shock and upset at CoG D's perceived coldness

when he told him of his ill health exemplified this. The divergence in their attributions symbolised the difficulties and limitations of the relationship, something CoG D was oblivious to but palpably greatly exercised Headteacher D.

6.3.7 The role of macrolevel influences.

Macrolevel influences on the relationship have, to an extent, been alluded to already when discussing instrumental attributions. For some, the headteacher-CoG relationship will be one that exists as part of the overall scheme of governance within the school so as to link the CEO – the headteacher – to the board chair. This was the perspective offered by CoG D: he was the chair of a charitable company and the headteacher was the chief executive and their duty was to perform those respective roles, communication between the two being the exception and not the norm. Indeed, when discussing the relationship more broadly, with colleagues and other professionals, this has been the most common perception. This is particularly so when it comes to the phrase 'critical friend', with many particularly disliking the term 'friend'. Indeed, one person referred to a LGB where the word was deliberately expunged, as it was deemed inappropriate for it to appear anywhere near a description of this relationship.

The relationship is not therefore an isolated event but a representation (at least in theory) of the wider hierarchy, structure and culture of the school (and now, increasingly commonly, the MAT). To that end, Barry and Crant (2000) employ Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens 1979, 1984) to explain how the communication styles of headteachers and CoGs mirror the exigencies of the organisation.

Hierarchy

Hierarchy, at least in theory, plays a significant role in the way that headteachers and CoGs communicate with each other. The CoG is the superior because they are

chair of the board and, ultimately, the board is responsible for the running of the school, including the employment of the headteacher. To that end, the CoG should be the one dictating the pattern of communication. On the other hand, the headteacher, as the leading professional responsible for all aspects of school leadership and management, is arguably better placed to do so. Furthermore, it is likely that most stakeholders within the school community will regard the headteacher as of primary importance, something which the CoG, and other governors, may wish to accommodate. There therefore needs to be some flexibility within the hierarchical model.

Structure

Structure also serves to dictate form. Within the research, this was apparent within the independent school relationships, largely due to the autonomy of the governing body. In all four cases, they appeared willing to grant a significant level of independence to the CoG and the headteacher to develop the relationship in the manner they wished: they did not seem to somehow subsume the relationship into an organisational hierarchy, as structuration theory would suggest. Indeed, CoG C remarked how supportive the rest of the board was for the semi-detachment of his relationship with Headteacher C.

In the state-funded schools, one could see this becoming more problematic, with Relationship G being most emblematic of the new structure of relationships that exist within MATs. For Headteacher G, therefore, the headteacher-CoG relationship was just one of many he had to negotiate within the labyrinthine structures in which he now found himself. He continued to have to work with the LGB, and CoG G, but was also responsible to a wide range of accountability measures within the MAT, as established via a network of executive officers. It is unsurprising that his communication with the CoG was less developed than others, as the structure in which it operated was becoming more complex and less adaptable.

Culture

> 'From a structuralist perspective, collective organizational culture is reproduced through communication at microlevels as individuals adopt social practices that adhere to social rules generated by macrolevel culture.'
> (Barry and Crant, 2000: 659)

Extending on what was said on the last point, the culture in which the relationship exists will considerably impact communication within the relationship. Within a larger federation of schools, such as a MAT, which is overseen by a dominant executive group, there will most likely (if not inevitably) be less flexibility and autonomy within individual schools out of a need for the federation as a whole to be – or at least appear to be – uniform and unified. The boundaries and expectations of the relationship will need to move to be in line with the requirements of the executive body rather than from a co-created set of priorities. Agenda items for meetings of the LGB at School G, for example, were already largely determined in advance by the MAT, leaving the school little opportunity to discuss or decide upon its own priorities.

In contrast, it was more difficult to detect an external cultural 'hand' guiding the relationship in the independent schools. If anything, the spirit of independence and separateness that runs through many of these schools served to underscore the ability of the participants to conduct the relationship as they wished. It was possible to discern some of this independence in two of the state-funded schools not already in a MAT but, in these instances, the participants appreciated that soon both parties would become part of wider networks and that communication patterns would therefore become more diffuse and potentially less interdependent.

6.3.8 Summary of Section 6.3.

Barry and Crant (2000) admit their model suffered from an element of simplicity and therefore ignored some of the caveats that are inevitably forthcoming

whenever a model is applied to real-life situations. For example, they appreciated that a range of characteristics, such as gender, disability, race and age, all play a role in the way that individuals communicate with each other and that the variables can be infinite, so that what works in one relationship may be ineffective or inappropriate in another. The relationships studied in this research work in the way they do because of the individuals involved: different individuals and you get a different relationship.

However, an analysis has to start somewhere. The three relational antecedent 'groups' successfully address what communication within a relationship involves, how it can be undertaken and why and, through doing so, one can appreciate both the extent and the interrelatedness of the components that at least can exist within successful workplace relationships. Most significant of all is the power of expressive attributions and how motivation within relationships is key: that those which are founded on high levels of frequency, empathy and commitment (to name but three) are more likely to reach a state of 'interactional richness' than those which rely on instrumental attributions. It is also the case that the most successful relationships are those where the participants' attributions converge, whether that was regarding expressive or instrumental motivations.

6.4 The factors involved in the development of trust, as portrayed in Mayer et al's model of trust, and whether friendship is possible or even desirable in workplace relationships.

Already in this chapter, it has been established how important trust is within high-level and high-performing relationships: Gambetta (1988) refer to it as 'a fundamental ingredient or lubricant, an unavoidable dimension of social interaction' (Gambetta, 1988: 219). This was the reason for including a specific question about trust within the interview schedule and, elsewhere in the interviews, participants were keen to raise and discuss the issue, as it was clearly crucial to them in the way they thought about the relationship. The need for trust is therefore well established; more problematic is how this can be defined and what factors within the relationship lead to the development and maintenance of trust. LMX research also suggests that it is unlikely that levels of trust will be the same between supervisor and subordinate (Brower et al, 2000).

Mayer et al (1995) take issue with some of the most commonly held components of trust that have been suggested, such as cooperation, confidence and predictability. They point out that each of these can exist on their own without trust necessarily being present. For example, it is possible to cooperate with another in a relationship without trust being present; it is also possible for participants to act predictably without trust, when one can be confident that the other will act in an untrustworthy fashion. What is essential for trust to exist is when there is a degree of vulnerability involved, which means that the trustor has to take a calculated risk in the trustee that they will fulfil their side of the bargain. The need for trust comes from the risk of potential jeopardy if trust is absent, it being a moot point whether trust is an antecedent of such an attitude ('I am going to trust you so that we can achieve a beneficial outcome') or a consequence ('I am able to trust you because we have a achieved a beneficial outcome').
To take this further, Mayer et al (1995) created a model of dyadic trust, as it exists in organisations. This is shown in Figure 6.3.

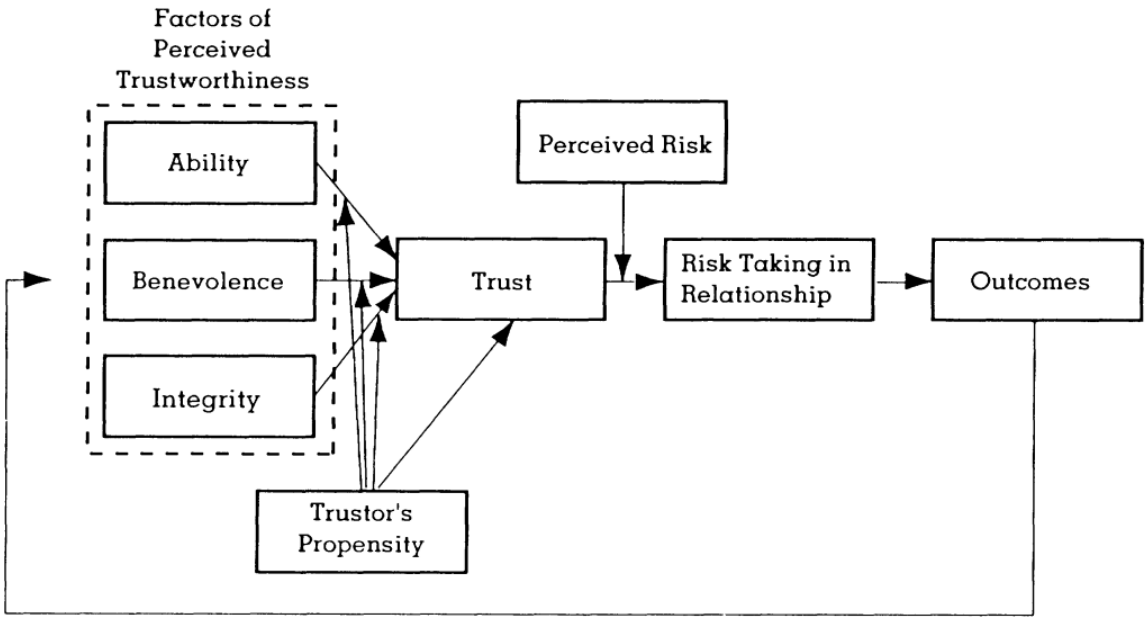

Figure 6.3: Mayer et al's proposed model of trust (Mayer et al, 1995: 715).

Mayer et al's model has three principal components: the trustor, the trustee and the form and nature of the trust itself. Both trustor and trustee have certain characteristics that make trust a more or less likely outcome. For the trustor, they defined this as the 'propensity to trust' or 'a generalized expectation about the trustworthiness of others', which will differ from person to person, according to their 'developmental experiences, personality types, and cultural backgrounds' (Mayer et al, 1995: 715). In practice, someone could believe in 'blind trust', where they would be prepared to trust people who have not earned trust, whereas another would be unwilling to trust in most situations, regardless of the circumstances.

The propensity to trust can also depend greatly on the actions and attitudes of the trustee, which Mayer et al (1995) slim down to three, ability, benevolence and integrity:

- Ability has been defined separately as 'competence' or 'expertise', with Gabarro (1978) identifying nine 'bases' of trust, including functional/specific competence, inter-personal competence, business sense and judgement. In

other words, the trustor needs to be assured that the trustee knows what they are doing and that they can be trusted to carry out their role proficiently.

- Benevolence 'is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor [and] suggests that the trustee has some specific attachment to the trustor' (Mayer et al, 1995: 717). This can be interpreted in many ways but fundamentally it concerns the motivation of the trustee; that there is a direct responsibility to the trustor, arising (at least in part) from altruism as opposed to self-interest.
- Integrity translates as the trustor's perception that 'the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable'. It is not enough for the trustee to hold a certain set of principles: these need to be in sympathy with those held by the trustor. Their actions and behaviours are also important 'and the extent to which the party's actions are congruent with his or her words' all affect the trustor's view of the trustee's integrity.

Mayer et al (1995) go on to explain that these three qualities are interrelated and each will impact on the other. Integrity, they view as key in the initial stages, whereas it is hard to judge benevolence at the very start of a relationship. Over time, however, benevolence will become more significant, either improving the relationship through a positive impact on the trustor's opinion of the trustee's ability and integrity, or, if absent, having a negative effect.

Central also to their model is the importance of risk. Trusting in itself, they argue, is not inherently risky; what is risky is when that trust is tested, when a trustor requires something from the trustee with no complete assurance that that will be granted or secured. They argue that risk-taking is different in a relationship because there is naturally a history and a culture (which they term 'the antecedents of trust' (Mayer et al, 1995: 727)) established within a relationship that inform the attitude towards taking risks. There is also a context outside the relationship, which adds extra information as to the choices around risk-taking. The model thus weaves the factors surrounding ability, benevolence and integrity into the questions of risk, where the trustor will question how far the trustee has

the ability to carry out a task to the trustor's satisfaction, whether it will be performed in the trustor's interests and how far the trustee will be honest or open about their actions. Furthermore, 'the trustor perception and interpretation of the context of the relationship will affect both the need for trust and the evaluation of trustworthiness' (Mayer et al, 1995: 727) because it may be that circumstances outside the relationship may serve to override existing judgements and perceptions within the dyad.

The research data exemplifies much of what the model suggests. Several of the participants indicated that they had a 'propensity to trust', gained in part due to their personality but more due to their positive experiences in previous relationships. Headteacher D, for example, spoke confidently about the trust he had had with previous CoGs, which had been consistently reciprocated. CoG B said that he found it most natural to begin a relationship from a position of trust. Those who were newer to the post, either as headteacher or CoG, appeared more reticent to admit to automatic trust, insisting that it was earned over time. This indicated a natural cautiousness in some but also a sense that to be too trusting would in a way be either naïve or inappropriate, it being important to maintain – or, at least, to be seen to maintain – a degree of distance and caution. To that end, particularly within Relationships E, F, G and H, participants tended to model an approach whereby trust was earned gradually over time, a period extending from just a few weeks to several months. Interestingly, these were from the four state-funded schools, perhaps indicating a cultural tendency to avoid an overly informal or relaxed connection.

The data also reveals the importance of ability, benevolence and integrity within the trustees. Several of the headteachers were effusive when they spoke of the ability of their CoG. Headteachers A and F, for example, recognised their professional and governance expertise, particularly as it came from the educational sector; Headteacher B believed CoG B's experience in the NHS meant that his ability to chair and mentor came with a level of sensitivity and insight not always found in other professions. These perceptions undoubtedly made for

important precursors to trust. Interestingly, the CoGs were more ambivalent towards the headteachers' abilities, often admiring some of their qualities but seeing part of their role as to step in and support when they were potentially falling short. CoG H, for example, was quite frank as to Headteacher H's lack of compassion (as he saw it). It would have been interesting to explore this further, it being natural perhaps for the headteacher's abilities to be interrogated more deeply than the CoG's, given the CoG's responsibility to hold the headteacher to account. One question regarding this is how far educationalists are respectful of others' professional backgrounds, something which is not always reciprocated.

Benevolence was undoubtedly a key contributor to trust, as most participants were effusive in their praise for their counterpart's support and motivation. Almost all recognised the level of personal connection there was in the relationship and, even in Relationship D, there was an acknowledgement of the commitment that they both gave to their roles (if not necessarily to each other). For some, this was almost instinctive: Headteacher A, for example, considered it in her nature to think the best of people and their approach and attitude to her but she had also known CoG A for some time before he started at School A and so that was a clear advantage. Headteacher H spoke of how he was able to form an instant connection with CoG H because he could see his obvious passion for School H and was willing to receive mentoring so that he could learn how to do the job well. Others saw benevolence as evolving over time, as the two participants got to know each other better. In some instances, accelerating – or decelerating – their perception of benevolence came about through reaction to risk-taking incidents, as explained below.

Comments from Headteacher C on his relationship with CoG C revealed some contrary experiences regarding integrity. He clearly had great respect for CoG C and this had developed rapidly from when they first met at interview. Their common background and values soon meant that Headteacher C felt that CoG C was not just a strategic ally but he soon recognised that they had developed a close friendship, the purview of which went beyond school matters. The integrity

of CoG C became particularly apparent when the school faced the death of three students in separate incidents within the first four years of Headteacher C's tenure. Headteacher C felt firmly that CoG C 'had his back' and that his support for him was genuine and personal, as opposed to merely supporting him as postholder. In turn, this display of integrity served to intensify the sense of benevolence that Headteacher C had already experienced. A further example was demonstrated just before the interview took place, when Headteacher C felt he could be honest with CoG C about a conversation was having with the CoG at another school about another post. CoG C assured him that he would only discuss the matter with two other governors and the fact that confidentiality was assured beyond this only served to cement CoG's integrity further in the eyes of Headteacher C. Headteacher C did recall, however, a further incident when CoG C failed to reprimand another governor, who was felt to be undermining the school leadership. The way this was remembered showed that he was still smarting from this perceived lack of courage, thus casting an aspersion over CoG C's integrity. In such a way, it can be seen how such events can affect degrees of trust within this relationship.

The example of Relationship C also reinforces Mayer et al's (1995) argument about the contribution that risk-taking has within the progression (or regression) of the relationship. For example, Headteacher C's risk in informing CoG C about the potential job move was received calmly and positively, an act which served to deepen trust through validating him taking the risk. Relationship E was also significantly enhanced through CoG E's response to Headteacher E's risk in communicating her distress when she was having to deal with a difficult work situation whilst absent from school due to illness. In interview, Headteacher E recalled that she was in a deeply emotional state and being so open and 'raw' when on the phone to CoG E was without precedent for her. She was anxious as to how this vulnerability would be received. CoG E's kindness and sympathy had a huge impact and served to accelerate the level of trust that she had in the relationship, which was still at an early stage. A less successful episode of risk-taking came when Headteacher D contacted CoG D to say that he needed to take

a fortnight off work due to a physical manifestation of stress. CoG D's terse – albeit supportive – response reinforced the limited degree of trust that there was in the relationship.

It has been argued that 'trust is required in cases of imperfect knowledge' as 'when people have total knowledge and information, they do not require anything from others and there is no scope for trust … in cases of total ignorance, there is little data to base your trust on' (Dadhich & Bhal, 2008: 18). The headteacher-CoG relationship reflects this precisely. Both participants have considerable knowledge and expertise but, due to the nature and scope of their remit, they will never know all the facts nor all the potential outcomes: there will be always known – and even unknown – unknowns. With that in mind, risk-taking is inevitable, as they seek to expand their existing knowledge and explore solutions, either jointly or separately. Trust within the relationship provides some protection for taking those risks, as either party is reassured by the ethical and emotional investment of the other.

Mayer et al's (1995) model of trust succinctly defines at least some of the factors at play when building trust within a dyad such as this. As expected, with the data confirming this, in such an intimate relationship between individuals bearing considerable responsibilities, it is difficult for a relationship to develop positively without the presence of trust. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the greatest restriction to such development would be the absence of trust.

6.4.1 The role of friendship in workplace relationships.

Perhaps the most powerful impression from undertaking the interviews was the strength of affection that could lay at the heart of this relationship. To an extent, this was anticipated beforehand, hence the inclusion of the question regarding the phrase 'critical friend', the intention here being to examine the potential friction that can arise within this relationship between the desire to support and the need

to call to account. However, what came across throughout the interviews was the personal and emotional commitment that the majority of the participants gave to the relationship. It is therefore natural to reflect on whether it would be correct to term this a 'friendship' and how far, at its best, it can and should encompass the personal alongside the professional.

In regard to the question on the phrase 'critical friend', the responses coalesced around the following statements:

- 'Critical' is an unfortunate term to use, as it implies something negative or harsh, whereas it is most likely meant to be much more positive and supportive. The CoG's role – as seen from both perspectives – has to involve them being able to speak frankly to the headteacher but privately and constructively in order to promote self-reflection and professional development.
- 'Friend' is inappropriate in this context. Part of the CoG's role, alongside the rest of the governing body, is potentially to dismiss the headteacher and so it is unwise for the two to become too close. That said, there is scope for the relationship not to be wholly formal and the personal wellbeing and wider life of the headteacher should be of concern to the CoG so they are able to carry out their professional responsibilities.

What was revealing on further questioning, however, was the extent to which both parties, but headteachers in particular, had been impacted by demonstrations of considerable empathy, insight and emotional intelligence and the space and scope to explore subjects, both serious and trivial, that would be considered beyond the typical boundaries of such a relationship. This led me to question how far the lines between the professional and personal had become blurred in some of the relationships and whether this was necessarily to be regretted or, on the contrary, enabled them to function more effectively.

As has already been established, Relationship C was probably the closest of the relationships, with both participants recognising the frequency of their communication, both formal and informal, their mutual respect, trust and honesty

and the extent to which they had formed a strategic union within the school's leadership and governance. Although they stopped short of adopting the term 'friends', they exhibited many of the qualities of friends: for example, shared interests, a similar sense of humour and a willingness to meet socially on a regular basis. In both the interviews undertaken, the strength and significance of their relationship was palpable and the repercussions of this were being felt elsewhere in the school's management structure, all mostly to the benefit of the organisation.

Much of the research that has been undertaken with regard to friendship within workplaces has tended to view it as beneficial. On an individual basis, it can provide emotional support (House, 1981; Karasek, 1979), foster positive identity development (Dutton et al, 2010; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) and help employees to flourish (Colbert et al, 2016). Friendships can also benefit the organisation through facilitating cooperation and cohesion (Jehn & Shah, 1997) and driving creativity and innovation (Lu et al, 2017). However, Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) have highlighted what they term the 'dark sides' of workplace friendship, where friendship impedes performance at both an individual and organisational level. Friends may therefore be overly distracted by personal concerns and there may be 'interrrole conflict' arising from 'the tension between the informality of friendship and the formality of organizational roles and structure' (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018: 642). Regarding the organisation, a close friendship could lead to 'group-think', particularly in a dyad, which, by definition, can prohibit diverse thinking; in turn, this may 'lead to inhibited knowledge sharing across the organization because of the formation of identity-based cliques' (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018: 646).

'Friendship' is perhaps, therefore, an unhelpful term to use, as it can have quite polarising connotations: overly 'matey' and informal on the one hand, unprofessional and 'cliquey' on the other. As the respondents observed, 'critical' also has pejorative attributes. Perhaps for that reason, the phrase 'critical friend' has rightly been removed from official guidance regarding this relationship,

although it remains in common parlance as a shorthand descriptor. More appropriate, perhaps, would be to enlist alternative qualities that would be a more suitable fit. The ASPIRE framework (Roffey 2016), described in Section 2.2, is a suitable substitute. In their individual ways, each of these more highly developed relationships reflected these attributes to a significant extent. In doing so, they create an effective bridge between the desire – and need – to remain professional, whilst recognising the value in maintaining and developing a personal dimension to the relationship. This reflects Crawford's (2012) argument that emotionally intelligent leadership is essential in balancing accountability with collaboration. By giving the term 'critical friend' greater contextual depth, it becomes possible to describe the headteacher-CoG relationship in ways that better reflect its complexity and significance within school leadership.

6.4.2 Summary of Section 6.4.

This section has shown that trust is a central component in the relationship between headteachers and CoGs. Drawing on Mayer et al's (1995) model of dyadic trust, the data illustrates how trust arises from perceptions of ability, benevolence and integrity, influenced by each individual's inherent propensity to trust, which is shaped by personality, past experiences and contextual factors. Trust is not simply a matter of cooperation or predictability but rather involves vulnerability and the willingness to take relational risks. Participants in the study often reflected on how such risks, when met with empathy and understanding, served to strengthen the relationship. The interviews revealed that headteachers were generally more vocal in their praise of their CoGs' competence, whereas CoGs often viewed part of their role as providing constructive challenge, even when admiring the headteachers' qualities. The emotional depth of some relationships also raised questions about the appropriateness of the term 'critical friend', which many participants felt carried unhelpful connotations, and how far friendship should exist in workplace relationships. It was concluded that qualities such as empathy, respect and emotional intelligence appeared to better reflect the

nature of the most effective partnerships. The ASPIRE framework (Roffey, 2016) perhaps offers a more comprehensive lens through which to view such relationships.

6.5 The headteacher-CoG relationship as viewed through the life cycle of leadership making.

Having established key components of the relationship – self-concept, communication and trust – this section focuses on how the relationship develops over time, using Green and Uhl-Bien's life cycle (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 231) as a framework. In the life cycle, there are three phases – 'stranger', 'acquaintance' and 'maturity' – but, for the purposes of this research, their simple diagram (shown in Chapter 3) has been expanded and developed to illustrate some of the issues at work in each of the phases. The danger in splitting up the relationship into three distinct phases is that it could be construed as misleading, as each of the phases is on a continuum. The research reveals clearly the dynamics within each relationship, where periods of intense interaction or prolonged neglect can serve to accelerate or decelerate the closeness between the participants; the three phases thus act as broad umbrellas to bracket different stages of this development.

The model has been developed to include the range of factors that may be present with headteacher-CoG relationships. There is not the time to explore these in detail within this thesis but they are included to reflect at least some of the issues and tensions that may be present in each of the phases. Added to the model are arrows which emphasise how time acts as a dynamic, which can be sped up or slowed down due to 'events', which may be particularly successful interactions or negative occurrences. The colouring of the phases is also deliberate, as the relationship moves from a light lilac to a deep purple. Arising from the research, I have included the 'headwind' of culture and convention, which can be defined as the pressure felt by the majority of participants to be

wary of becoming too close or too personal, which is sometimes perceived as a potential temptation within this relationship.

6.5.1 The 'stranger' phase.

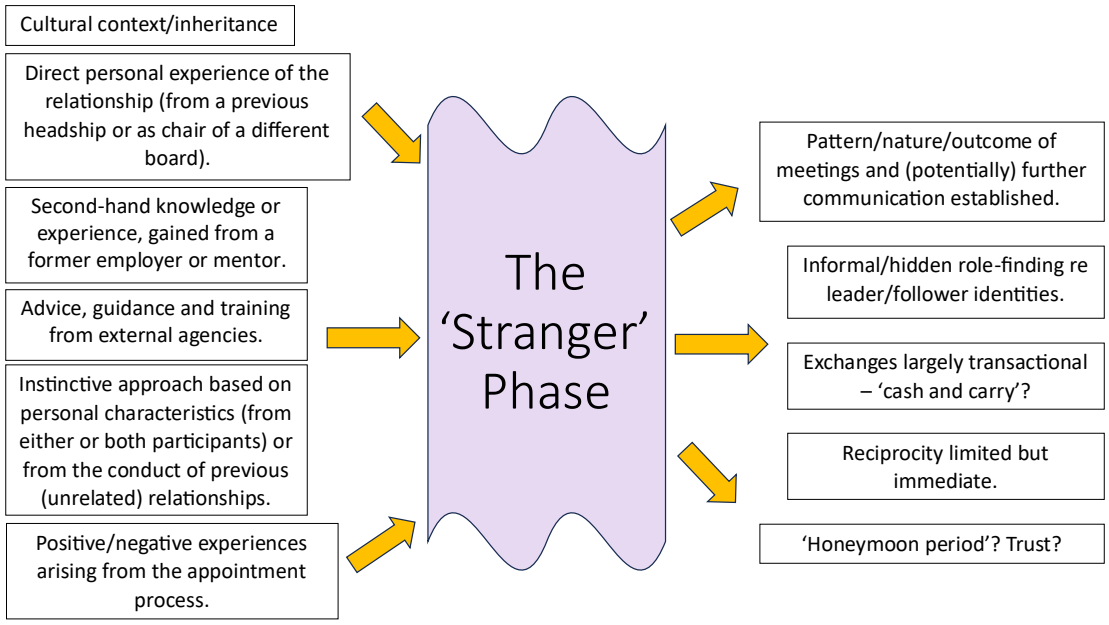

Figure 6.5: The 'stranger' phase.

Early success of the 'stranger' phase can depend on a beneficent cultural inheritance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, no relationship begins in a vacuum and, therefore, the context in which it exists can be highly significant because the histories of previous postholders or relationships can cast a long shadow. Sometimes, if the previous postholder has been regarded as particularly successful or impactful, this can lead to there being a sense that there are 'big shoes to fill', resulting in expectations that are unfair or unrealistic. Conversely, if the new relationship is formed following an unsuccessful tenure – with perhaps a hasty exit of either the headteacher or the CoG – it can lead to a wish to forget about, or ignore, the recent past in the hope that a veil can quickly be drawn over past events through the actions of the incoming regime. Both present a significant challenge for the

nascent relationship, as its early formation will, at least in part, reflect the cultural legacy of its forebears.

A negative prior experience can also lead to the newcomer being unfairly judged by their counterpart. Such a perception may disadvantage and even damage the new relationship. Othman et al (2014) have documented the importance of this, citing Scandura (1999), who stressed the need for 'fairness' in creating high LMX relationships, especially when 'the nature of social exchange has repercussions beyond the dyadic relationship' (Othman et al, 2014: 347). Participants may therefore need to work to divest themselves of prior histories and perceptions, otherwise the new relationship may struggle in its infancy. A negative prior experience can, however, be used to the relationship's advantage: Headteachers B and D clearly felt that they benefited from something of a 'honeymoon period', given, respectively, the style of the previous headteacher and the sudden departure of the CoG.

Prior knowledge or experience of the relationship can give participants an advantage in framing its inception.

The interviews revealed how positive and negative experiences of previous headteacher-CoG relationships play a significant role in shaping those that come after. This extends both to the way in which participants approach new relationships and the practical arrangements put in place to conduct them. Headteacher D, for example, said that, when he arrived at School D, he sought to replicate the consistently positive experiences he had had with the five CoGs in his previous headship. As he admitted, he did not feel the need to change his approach to the relationship once at School D, as it had always been successful in the past, even though School D's culture and financial position differed markedly from those at his previous school. Despite this, for a while, this approach worked well, as proven by his relationship with the first CoGs at School D. However, the distant and dysfunctional relationship he had with CoG D caught him by surprise, showing the risk of believing that what works in one relationship will work in

another. Due to his extensive experience, Headteacher D felt he knew what worked. However, successful co-created relationships depend on the support and sympathy of the other participant, suggesting that it never pays to become complacent when it comes to forming such relationships.

Headteacher A followed a similar path, approaching each new CoG relationship in an almost identical way. CoG A was her fifth CoG at School A yet her approach to most of the practical – and, most pertinently, the emotional – aspects of the relationship remained the same. When she had first arrived at School A over a decade earlier, she was inexperienced and had no direct experience of governance. Her first CoG had lavished considerable attention on her during the appointment process and then continued to mentor her once in post. They became friends and have continued as such to the present day. The CoG lived locally and was keen to meet regularly, hence the hourly meeting in-person every week, in which the new headteacher was given considerable latitude to be counselled about her day-to-day experiences. Headteacher A then replicated this approach with the four subsequent CoGs over a period of sixteen years. CoG A was tolerant of this approach, especially given the inadequate support he had received from CoGs when he had been a headteacher, although he insisted that the weekly meetings be conducted over telephone. However, in interview, he appeared frustrated by Headteacher A drawing him into lengthy conversations about operational matters. He accepted that this was her 'style' but felt it indicated a level of 'neediness', which was unnecessary given her tenure, and a tendency to use him as a substitute for her senior team, whom she appeared reluctant to confide in. Other governors were also apparently concerned about Headteacher A's over-reliance on CoG A for advice and emotional support.

For CoGs, prior experience as a CoG, or as a Chair in a CEO-Chair relationship, or within education as a senior or headteacher, gave them an immediate advantage in appreciating how to frame the relationship. That did not necessarily mean that they dominated the relationship: indeed, quite the opposite, as it often meant that their initial approach was to bolster the new arrival with support and empathetic

understanding, inviting them to take the initiative. CoGs B and C, for example, specifically cited their previous experience as Chairs to explain how they sought to craft the relationship from the beginning, CoG B setting specific targets for Headteacher B to focus on (as he had when working within the NHS) and CoG C lowering the expectations of Headteacher C as to how often they would be able to meet.

A lack of formal training and guidance can lead some to rely on informal advice from former colleagues or mentors.

No participant appeared to rely on any guidance or training from external bodies, whether that be professional associations or governmental bodies, when it came to determining their approach to the relationship. As indicated earlier, attempts have been made to reach out to CoGs – and, more recently, headteachers – to appraise them on how to manage the relationship but there appeared little evidence within the interview data that this advice was being either accessed or followed. Indeed, Headteacher C believed quite firmly that 'there's nothing out there'. It is therefore fair to surmise that participants within this relationship have either been unaware of any guidance that exists or have not regarded it as important to access when determining how to approach the relationship.
One participant did say how he benefited from mentoring or training. In fact, only CoG H referred to any external support, that being the offer of a LA mentor and it was only after he had become CoG that he took advantage of this. CoG H was different from other CoGs in that he did not come from an academic or professional background. His expertise derived from being self-made and from building and developing his own business. As an interviewee, he was unusual in that he was prepared to admit to deficiencies in his knowledge. He acknowledged that being a governor was outside his 'comfort zone' and that he appreciated the opportunity to learn from someone considered an 'expert'. This was revealing, as it suggests that existing professionals are either not able or willing to ask for guidance or do not view it as necessary or that the assistance available is unsatisfactory.

It was apparent that advice and mentoring from former colleagues proved highly educative in helping participants to understand the relationship. The opportunity to discuss, or even be aware of, the headteacher-CoG relationship was regarded as helpful by headteachers when they later took up post or at least they were able to appreciate the importance of the relationship and how it could impact positively or negatively on headship, even if they were not fully in position to understand how or why this was the case. Where this was the case, participants clearly treasured these moments and recognised how special and impactful they were, giving reinforcement, as if it was needed, to the importance played by coaching in developing professionals. It also illustrates how such coaching moments are often unplanned and based on chance, luck and happenstance, again as acknowledged by several of the participants.

Contact during and immediately after the appointment process can accelerate the earliest stages of the 'stranger' phase.

Positive experiences within the appointment process can assist in accelerating the 'stranger' stage of the relationship. Several participants confirmed how impactful the appointment process was and how aspects of it had directly affected the headteacher-CoG relationship from the outset. Even 16 years on, Headteacher A's approach continued to mirror the strong bond she had formed with her first CoG at interview and Headteacher B spoke of how much he valued the hands-on initiative of the CoG during the process at School B (a striking contrast to what he had experienced in his previous headship). These two examples reflected what was regarded as a personal commitment, a willingness by the CoG to show interest in them as people and not just as professionals. Headteachers C and F said they were particularly drawn to the values expressed by the CoG and how it important it was to them that these aligned with their own.

The fact that three of these examples were in independent schools is most likely significant, given the greater freedom and flexibility afforded to CoGs in these schools to define and run the appointment process. CoG C, for example, believed

it was of paramount importance that he ran the process and allowed himself considerable time with each candidate to question them on their character. His choice of Headteacher C directly arose from his summation that his personality, beliefs and outlook were similar to his own. Outside of the perhaps more formal features of processes in state-funded schools, there were some insights as to how this could be undertaken informally. Prior to his appointment, CoG E met with Headteacher E to judge whether they would 'get along' and the fact the meeting conveyed openness and honesty, was a key factor in him accepting the position and initiating the relationship positively. It could be argued that, during an appointment process, there is an opportunity for some early contracting, given that it is not a 'done deal' and there is scope for some hidden negotiation.

Success in the 'stranger' phase can depend on participants' instincts and personality traits regarding relationship formation.

A key ingredient within the formation of the relationship is the underlying motivation and approach of each of the participants. Perhaps not surprisingly, both headteachers and CoGs within the sample came across as extroverts – strong, outgoing personalities, eager to engage and make an impact – which was no doubt a factor in why they sought and were chosen for the position.

Within Graen and Uhl Bien's description of the 'stranger' phase, it is suggested that this is a period of 'role-finding', although, at the start of the headteacher-CoG relationship, it is sometimes unclear as to who should perform the 'leader' or 'member' role. Some of the headteachers recalled how, particularly in their first headship, they saw themselves as taking a subservient role to the CoG. This was, in part, due to the dominant personality of the CoG, formed through their own personality and their existing status within the school. Headteacher D certainly experienced this at his first school and, for him, this was a bonus, not a threat. He saw himself as young and inexperienced and supported the guiding hand of the charismatic and decisive CoG. Similarly, CoG F, although he was new to the role of CoG at School F, had been a governor at the school for some years, had

previously been a CoG and was the CEO of a large MAT. He therefore believed it was only right that he took on the preeminent role.

These relationships therefore saw the leadership role becoming more shared as they developed. In others, it was apparent, at least at face value, that the 'leader' role was adopted at first by the headteacher. This was either because they had been in post for some time, such as Headteacher A, and so therefore felt able to dictate terms as to how the relationship would be conducted, or, due to their own self-confidence (engendered partly by the mentoring mentioned above), as in the case of Headteacher C, able to initiate discussions with the CoG as to how they wish to proceed.

Oversimplifying the allocation of roles within a relationship as complex as this would be a mistake, as the appearance of deference, especially in the early stages, could be regarded as a wise opening stance. The headteacher has, after all, been appointed to a CEO role: it is in the CoG's best interests to foster a sense of self-belief and decisiveness. A willingness to be submissive could therefore be regarded as a ploy of leadership, enabling desirable characteristics in the other. Likewise, a headteacher new in post will be aware of the danger of overreaching their authority at too early a stage, preferring instead to let the CoG, especially an incumbent, take the initiative to begin with. Headteacher G, for example, even though CoG G had been in post whilst he was a deputy at the school, did not presume to exploit this familiarity once he had acceded to the headship, allowing CoG G to maintain the dominant position. For strategic purposes, the instinct to lead, at least in the short term, can therefore be obscured by an apparent willingness to follow.

Within these early stages, it is also possible to detect a degree of (arguably) English reticence as to how these first tentative steps are taken. Several of the participants remarked positively on the qualities of humility and modesty they saw in their counterparts. Given the complications as to which role is preeminent within the relationship, it is perhaps unsurprising that neither party necessarily

wished to declare superiority when setting about constructing the relationship. This perhaps explains why several participants preferred to use the word 'evolved' when describing how the relationship developed in its early stages, as to suggest that one party was the lead decision-maker could perhaps give the impression of a rather vulgar dominance by one over the other. CoG E, for example, came across as someone who agonised about his role as CoG, his own abilities and how he came across to Headteacher E.

The initial approach and motivation towards communication can serve to define the principal 'architecture' of the relationship.

What quickly becomes apparent both prior to and during the 'stranger' phase are the instinctive communication approaches of both participants. These may have been evident during the appointment process or in the period immediately afterwards. Some viewed it as important for a regular pattern of communication to be established quickly on appointment; others for such contact to be initiated at some point once the postholder was formally in situ. CoG C, for example, having already inculcated a personal dimension to his relationship with Headteacher C during the appointment process, immediately sought to develop this in the ensuing weeks and months, inviting Headteacher C and his wife for a meal at his house and regularly updating him on school matters.

Others preferred a more evolutionary approach, engaging first on largely practical, mundane concerns. Within the LMX life cycle, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) termed this the 'cash and carry' feature of the 'stranger' phase, in which little is expected – or even wanted – from the relationship at this early stage. Exchanges move little beyond the superficial and immediate but limited reciprocity is expected, as the information being transferred is of minor significance in what could be termed a 'getting to know you' phase.

What is striking is how far a desire and an ability to move beyond this more restrained phase can serve to accelerate the development and pace of the

relationship. Whilst there was a practical edge to Relationship C's contact prior to appointment – the long 'interregnum' period necessitated a need to 'keep in touch' and Headteacher C requested advice on a property purchase – a deeper professional bond was engendered through both parties making themselves available to each other and this meant that they had already progressed through much of the 'stranger' phase by the time Headteacher C actually began in post.

6.5.2 The 'acquaintance' phase.

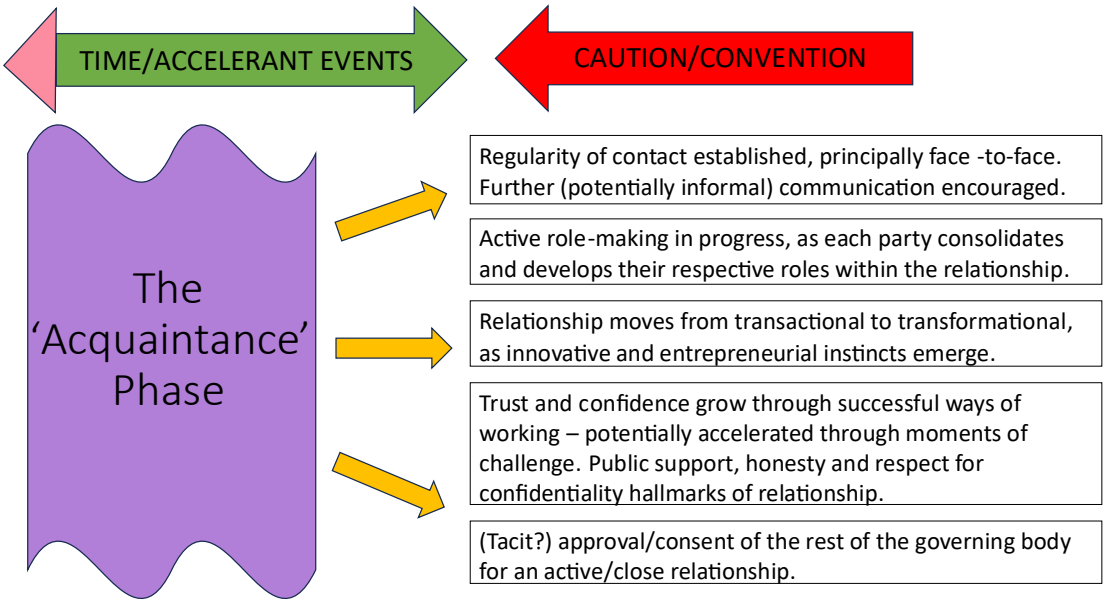

Figure 6.5: The 'acquaintance' phase.

Successful patterns of communication formed within the 'stranger' phase will likely lead to closer and more intense contact within the 'acquaintance' phase.

All bar Relationship D established a pattern of regular communication within three months of their inception, albeit this differed in nature and frequency. From the evidence of these relationships, one can conclude that they develop within the 'acquaintance' phase through this communication becoming less focused on specific, transactional concerns, moving instead to deeper and more wide-ranging

strategic issues. At the same time, contact may become more diverse, in both form and content. This may be due to the participants becoming more familiar with one another or from them having to deal with unpredictable events, leading to unforeseen actions and reactions.

The 'acquaintance' phase witnesses a more complex approach to role-making, with both participants willing to adopt a leader/follower position or act as equals in concert.

The life cycle framework suggests that the 'stranger' phase is a period of 'role-finding' and that the 'acquaintance' phase one of 'role-making' (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995: 231). The difficulties of role-finding have already been explored, given that both positions have leader and follower qualities. It may therefore take time for the postholders to understand the new relationship and their position within it, especially given a lack of guidance or preparation.

Role-making may be undertaken consciously by one or both parties or it may arise incidentally out of circumstance. CoGs A, F and G all identified their role within the relationship fairly swiftly: CoG A realised that he was principally a supporter of Headteacher A, as, although long-serving, she appreciated his counsel and advice; CoG F had previously been a CoG and headteacher and believed he had a clear understanding of the role he needed to play, which was to chair the board and mentor the headteacher; CoG G, having been a CoG for over 20 years, adapted her approach to fit in with the current headteacher, with her being prepared to be more submissive to reflect Headteacher G's relative indifference. Headteachers A and H also knew their roles early in the relationship: Headteacher A because this her fifth CoG at the same school and Headteacher H because he had involved in governor training at the LA and felt he had a clear view of what was involved.

To a greater or lesser degree, the other participants either did not consciously consider role-making or were aware that respective roles were being moulded due to circumstance or through the evolutionary 'to and fro' of interactions. For

example, CoG B saw himself largely as the dominant partner in the relationship to begin with, admitting that he was only partially aware of what the post involved, relying instead on past experience. On working with Headteacher B, particularly during the pandemic, he became more aware of Headteacher B's qualities and skills and saw himself as walking alongside him as a coach and mentor. They began sitting together during governors' meetings, becoming a visible duumvirate to the rest of the governing body. CoG E deliberately set out to avoid becoming too close to Headteacher E, as he had seen the dangers of there being too cozy a relationship in the past. However, largely due to circumstance, not least the pandemic, he came to soften this approach and act more in concert with Headteacher E, especially when it came to managing some minor dissent on the governing body.

Whilst time tends to bring participants within the relationship closer together, this process can be sped up through 'accelerant' events. It is also possible, however, for such events to hinder or even reverse further progress.

Risk-taking events during the 'acquaintance' can serve to bring dyads closer together, Relationships C and E being good examples of this. When recounting them during interview, Headteachers C and E revealed the depth of emotion they felt during these situations: this was clearly apparent in the way they spoke about what happened and how much the CoGs' responses impacted upon them. As such, they can be classed as 'accelerant' events, as they served to speed up the degree of trust and confidence they had in the relationship. Sometimes this can occur through design: Headteacher D, for example, recognised the value of the mentoring offered by the first CoG in his previous headship, which led to the two of them moving swiftly through the 'stranger' phase.

At other times, and probably more commonly, this arises from the participants' reactions to an event outside their control or a situation they had not necessarily anticipated. The pandemic naturally disrupted the expected pattern of all the

relationships, mostly to their benefit. CoG B recalled how his half-termly meetings with Headteacher B transformed into weekly contact, with largely long-term strategic concerns being replaced with more immediate day-to-day arrangements. They discussed issues which had previously been neglected or regarded as not a primary concern of governors: parental angst, teacher welfare and the wellbeing of the headteacher and his senior team. He also admitted that the pandemic gave him greater insight into the stresses faced by Headteacher B, giving him a more rounded view of his home and family life and how he had to juggle those alongside the enhanced responsibilities arising from the pandemic. Although, post-pandemic, contact had now become less frequent and more formal, the experience had led to a significant escalation within the relationship, as it had progressed quickly through the 'acquaintance' phase.

Both Headteacher F and CoG F felt they had drawn closer due to the reaction to an attempt by Headteacher F to introduce a new uniform code for Sixth Formers. The initiative was met with considerable opposition from the parent body and CoG F found himself having to defend Headteacher F and the way he had sought to introduce the change. What impressed Headteacher F the most was the level of public support that CoG F was prepared to give him, even though, in private, CoG F suggested that Headteacher F had been rather too hasty and uncompromising in the way that he had gone about it. Headteacher F appreciated the learning opportunity but also the fact he was given the support he needed to maintain his authority within the school community.

In each of these examples, one can appreciate that, if support had not been given or there had been breaches of confidence or a lack of empathy and compassion, then the result would have been a diminution of the relationship and a rapid reversal of progress that had been made through each of the stages. It is therefore perfectly possible within this framework for a relationship with the potential to progress through the 'acquaintance' stage finding itself moving back into a 'stranger' condition, where contact is perhaps rarer, less trusting and more distant.

The 'acquaintance' phase may also be marked by a recognition of the relationship by other elements of the school leadership, not least by the rest of the governing body.

Given that the 'stranger' phase occurs after one or both of the participants in the relationship are new to their role, it is unsurprising that the new partnership enters into something of a 'honeymoon period', both for the participants and for the wider organisation. As previously identified, the relationship is in a 'cash and carry' phase and its scope is largely transactional and most likely limited in its frame of reference. As the relationship progresses through the 'acquaintance' phase, others within the organisation may begin to recognise an improving and more impactful functionality, perhaps noticeable through it taking on a more strategic dimension.

The certainly happened with Relationship E, which was unsurprising given that School E was a new school, with an inexperienced governing body. The rest of the governing body sought leadership from Headteacher E and CoG E, particularly as the former had prior experience of governor training and the latter was closely linked to the MAT. The governing body – as perceived by the headteacher and CoG – therefore actively supported the two becoming closer and, if necessary, discussing strategy and governance issues outside of governors' meetings, although CoG E was cautious about this, him being firm that the board should remain resolutely autonomous. Headteacher E said the closeness of the relationship was also of assistance when dealing with the MAT and that they would often communicate jointly, especially if the tone of their correspondence was negative. CoG E believed this was only right, as he did not think 'she should be always sticking her neck out' with the MAT, the relationship thus being regarded as a unit of strength when having to deal with other elements of the organisation.

Whereas School E was the only secondary school within its MAT, School G was facing challenge from a number of other schools within its MAT, as well as from

the MAT itself. To that end, Headteacher G felt he needed to use the governing body as less a body to be accountable to than as a strategic ally in School G's 'battles' (as he saw them) with the MAT. However, he did not view his relationship with CoG G as strong or powerful enough to fulfil that task and so therefore enlisted others on the governing body to act in concert with him. This was not of huge concern to him because he felt that one of these would soon replace CoG G in her role but it did result in him having to devise alternative arrangements to the traditional headteacher-CoG relationship, which could only be to everyone's detriment.

A wider strategic purpose was evident from the inception of Relationship C. Headteacher C's predecessor had instituted a meeting comprising himself, the CoG and the chairs of the individual sub-committees, at which they would discuss the agenda for the forthcoming governors' meeting. This arrangement was continued by Headteacher C, as suggested by CoG C, and this soon became an opportunity for them to steer change successfully through the governing body. The two of them would therefore control the agenda for the pre-meeting and use that to garner wider support, so that, when the meeting occurred, they were able to secure agreement smoothly and without significant opposition. When questioned as to whether the rest of the governing body was concerned that their role in decision-making was being sidelined, CoG C felt that they were more reassured that he and Headteacher C were taking the strategic initiative. In this regard, he believed that the pandemic had been instructive, in that governors had appreciated that it was more efficient for headteacher and CoG to take more control of the strategic leadership of the school, given that governors were unable to come into school and meet in person. On reflection, he appreciated that this approach worked well principally because of the closeness and effectiveness of his relationship with Headteacher C. If that were not the case, other governors could become suspicious and even resentful of the dominance of the relationship.

6.5.3 The 'maturity' phase.

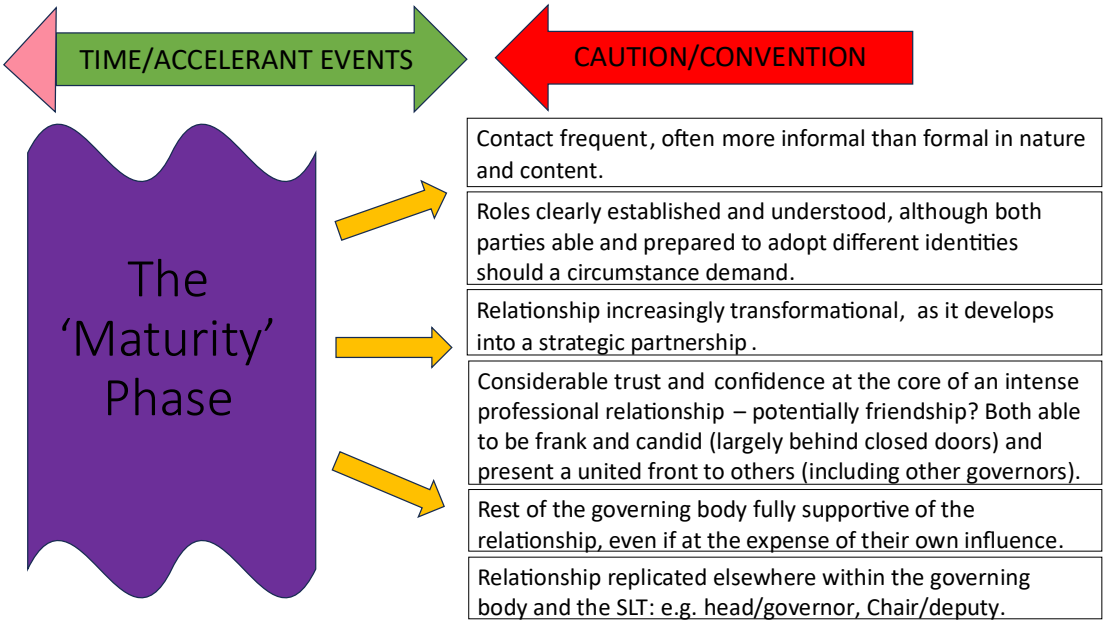

Figure 6.6: The 'maturity' phase.

By the 'maturity' phase, the relationship exemplifies, and is underpinned by, successful leadership behaviours, aided by frequent and intimate contact, considerable trust and mutual respect and a comfortable sharing of role identities.

Data from the interviews would indicate that Relationships A, B, C, E and F have entered the 'maturity' phase. As Graen and Uhl Bien (1995) envisaged, they have become fully-formed partnerships, as recognised by both parties. This is not to say that there was a sense of complacency or stasis about the relationship: on the contrary, the more developed the relationship, the more self-reflection and critique was offered by the participants.

What the evidence did show was that the behaviours underpinning the relationship were of a high order and in line with those compiled by Yukl et al (2008) (shown in Figure 4). This list includes a range of behaviours, which, they suggest, are exhibited in high LMX relationships.

Supporting	Acting considerate, showing sympathy and support when someone is upset or anxious, and providing encouragement and support when there is a difficult, stressful task
Recognizing	Providing praise and recognition for effective performance, significant achievements, special contributions, and performance improvements
Developing	Providing coaching and advice, providing opportunities for skill development, and helping people learn how to improve their skills
Consulting	Checking with people before making decisions that affect them, encouraging participation in decision making, and using the ideas and suggestions of others
Delegating	Assigning new responsibilities and additional authority to carry them out, and trusting people to solve problems and make decisions without getting prior approval
Clarifying	Assigning tasks and explaining job responsibilities, task objectives, and performance expectations
Short-term planning	Determining how to use personnel and resources to accomplish a task efficiently, and determining how to schedule and coordinate unit activities efficiently
Monitoring operations	Checking on the progress and quality of the work, and evaluating individual and unit performance
Leading by example	Setting an example of exemplary behavior for subordinates, and modeling behaviors that reflect the leader's values and standards
Envisioning change	Describing appealing outcomes that can be achieved by the unit, describing a proposed change with great enthusiasm and conviction

Figure 6.7: Definitions of the leader behaviours (Yukl et al, 2008: 292).

Yukl et al (2008) divided these behaviours into three categories: task-oriented, relations-oriented and change-oriented. For them, transformational leadership 'includes a combination of relations-oriented and change-oriented behaviors' (Yukl, 1999), with task-oriented behaviours traditionally left out of research on leader behaviour and LMX, its relevance being questioned. However, Yukl et al (2008) argue that this is mistaken, as 'clarifying roles and objectives, monitoring operations and individual performance, or making short-term plans' (Yukl et al, 2008: 291) are all connected to the development of reciprocal leadership within such relationships.

Interestingly, their research revealed a degree of frustration as to how each of these could be tested, especially through a largely quantitative methodology. This is because several of the behaviours are interrelated – and so it is difficult to determine their relative significance – and some too imprecise. For example, they found that leading by example was related significantly to LMX but 'only role modelling that reflects the leader's concern for the welfare of subordinates is likely to improve the exchange relationship' (Yukl et al, 2008: 296). This presents a challenge to existing methods of measuring LMX and further justifies a holistic

appraisal of each relationship, as occurred in this study, rather than an examination of specific factors in isolation.

In some ways, relations-oriented behaviours were evident early in each relationship, with the exception of Relationship D, albeit to varying degrees. Most gave instances of being supportive, including at particularly anxious or stressful moments. In terms of recognition, there was a general consensus about praise and recognition, although this was more effusive perhaps from headteachers about CoGs than the other way around. As for development, there were more examples about CoGs offering headteachers coaching and advice, which is perhaps to be expected given their perceived roles. There was a less consistent pattern in regard to task-oriented and change-oriented behaviours. All four participants in Relationships C and F had adopted behaviours which focused on change and the tasks necessary to accomplish it. Each had in mind a clear agenda and how, in partnership, they intended to use their relationship in order to drive this through. Relationship C channelled this through the pre-governors meeting of sub-committee chairs and Headteacher F was specifically granted time within the week to work on strategy he had devised jointly with CoG F. Relationship E had some attributes similar to this but it was still in its infancy and CoG E was conflicted by his desire to work closely with Headteacher E and his responsibilities towards the governing body. Relationship A and B, whilst working extremely closely overall, had much less of a joint focus on school strategy, with CoG A lamenting Headteacher A's inability to move on from the operational and Headteacher B being frustrated at CoG B's reliance on him for strategic direction. Taking a three-dimensional perspective of such behaviours within the 'maturity' phase therefore avoids certain aspects of a relationship – Headteacher A's adoration of CoG A, for example – from obscuring an accurate summation of the whole relationship.

The remit and impact of the relationship can extend to other aspects of leadership and governance.

One outcome of the interviews that was unexpected was an appreciation of the 'ripple effect' that the headteacher-CoG relationship can have elsewhere in the school leadership structure. Other leaders and governors appear to give tacit or even wholehearted approval for this; indeed, given it is so highly developed, it leads to similar relationships being replicated elsewhere, thus enabling a culture of relational leadership to become embedded within the institutional culture of the school.

Relationships C and H were the best examples of this. The highly developed relationship between Headteacher C and CoG C has already been described in detail. It is perhaps not surprising that their belief in forming strong and impactful relationships did not stop there. Headteacher C, for example, saw it as important that he developed an individual connection not just with the CoG but with all governors. Once a year, he therefore invited all the governors for a one-to-one meeting with him to discuss any school issue they felt it was important to raise. Headteacher C saw this as important for a number of reasons: it initiated (or developed) a personal connection with each governor, important especially since the era of remote meetings during the pandemic; it meant that the governor had an opportunity to discuss any aspect of school life that was of concern to them, rather than be controlled by an agenda; and it enabled Headteacher C to communicate with governors directly rather than through the mediation of CoG C (something CoG C was keen to encourage). In such a way, a series of bilateral relationships was formed, in turn creating a culture of relational leadership, whereby the overall relationship between headteacher and governors was underpinned by numerous sub-relationships.

CoG H also believed strongly in developing a culture of relational leadership. At first, this was developed due to him wanting to know more about governance and how School H functioned. He therefore interviewed each governor separately and

maintained an individual relationship with each of them subsequently. He also met with each member of the senior leadership team and continues to do so, in his belief that part of his role is to know what is happening in school so that he can report this back accurately to the rest of the governing body. Recognising his own deficiencies, he delegated scrutiny of financial issues to the Vice-CoG and encouraged her to meet separately with Headteacher H, and other senior leaders if need be, on a regular basis. He therefore believed strongly in a diffuse set of relationships, which would then be subsumed into the overall relationship between him and Headteacher H. In turn, Headteacher H was not alarmed by this approach, as he had been convinced by CoG H as to his motivation and style. In a different context, with alternative personalities, this could have added dysfunction to the relationship, but, with skill, it showed the power of relationship-building as a tool for leadership.

Both relationships show the potential value of relational leadership but illustrate that it is not without risk, especially if the principal relationship – that between headteacher and CoG – does not adhere to the ASPIRE principles.

6.5.4 Summary of Section 6.5.

The LMX life cycle provides a valuable framework, yet, in practical terms, headteacher-CoG relationships frequently evolve in ways that do not align neatly with predefined stages. Rather than progressing through a uniform sequence, interactions tend to develop fluidly, influenced by informal cues, shifting expectations and the surrounding organisational context. Initial dynamics are often shaped by how the leader and follower are introduced, the degree of voluntary engagement and the residual impact of prior professional experiences. As the relationship unfolds, communication patterns adapt gradually, sometimes due to formalised agreement and sometimes through contextual awareness and interpersonal responsiveness. Trust typically emerges not from structured progression but through accumulated interactions marked by consistency,

attentiveness and mutual reliability. Ultimately, the quality of the relationship is strengthened not by adherence to a fixed model but through an ongoing understanding, shaped by shared experiences and the evolving demands of school leadership and governance. These relational changes rarely proceed in a straightforward manner, adapted (both positively and negatively) by experience and circumstance.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Principal findings and the thesis' contribution to knowledge about the headteacher-CoG relationship.

This thesis has sought to investigate what is a largely private and understudied domain within educational leadership: the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG in English secondary schools. Despite the centrality of this dyad to the governance and strategic direction of schools, it remains a relationship that is often shrouded in secrecy and even senior leaders can be unaware of its existence, let alone its conduct. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the voices of those most intimately involved in this relationship are largely absent from both scholarly literature and policy discourse. Indeed, the private nature of the deliberations between headteachers and CoGs, often conducted behind closed doors and underpinned by complex interpersonal dynamics, means that neither party is incentivised to make the inner workings of the relationship public. As such, the findings of this research make an original contribution by bringing to the fore these voices and unpacking the subtle, yet profound, implications of their interactions.

The research questions shaped and structured the enquiry, guiding both the design of the interviews and the thematic analysis that followed. They allowed for a focused yet flexible exploration of the headteacher-CoG relationship. The study examined the extent to which individuals' prior experiences influenced their approach to the relationship (RQ1) and how initial dynamics were set during the appointment and induction process (RQ2). It then considered how the relationship evolved post-appointment, looking at the mechanisms through which communication, trust and collaboration were built over time (RQ3). Particular attention was paid to how the concept of the 'critical friend' was understood and enacted, especially in relation to the balance between support and challenge (RQ4). Finally, the research explored how headteachers and CoGs negotiated the

often-blurred boundary between strategic oversight and operational management (RQ5), as it was thought likely that these may prove central to any relational tensions uncovered through the research.

There were three key methodological strengths. First, having a sample made up of relationships from both the independent and state-funded sectors tested how far structural independence can influence their outcome. Second, the use of LMX placed the research in a broader context of workplace relationships and contributed to the growing body of literature highlighting the impact of relational leadership. Third, its use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has enabled the lived experiences of headteachers and CoGs to be heard and interpreted. In highlighting these voices, the study reveals the levels of emotion, intelligence and intensity that can potentially characterise this relationship.

As well as outlining immediate practical implications for the professional development of headteachers and CoGs, particularly in shaping mentoring and leadership training, this study uses the headteacher-CoG relationship as a lens through which to explore the nature of relational leadership. Hence the insights it offers are relevant across a wide range of organisational settings where leadership depends on trust, communication and collaboration. By paying close attention to the interpersonal aspects of relationships, the research contributes to a broader understanding of leadership as a fundamentally relational practice.

7.1.1 Early dynamics between headteachers and CoGs are shaped more through incidental learning and personal experiences than formal guidance and training.

The research reveals that, rather than having a preconceived idea of what the relationship will involve, both headteachers and CoGs enter their roles largely unprepared by formal training or induction. For the most part, they appear to rely instead on fragments of prior experience, informal mentoring and chance

conversations with predecessors. A lack of formal preparation for the relationship creates an environment where prior personal experience becomes the principal currency of knowledge. This means that the beginning of each relationship is, in some ways, a process of 'feeling one's way through', where anecdotal insights and the lessons of previous encounters serve as the primary guideposts for navigating the demands of the relationship as it emerges.

In their responses to RQ1, several headteachers recalled that they had only a vague idea of what to expect from the relationship with their CoG. Instead, their approach to initial encounters was informed by casual exchanges with former headteachers or through incidental exposure to governance processes during their earlier careers. In similar fashion, most CoGs, even those with experience in governance from other sectors or roles, found that the specific dynamics of working with a headteacher posed new challenges that their previous roles had not necessarily prepared them for. Only in rare cases did an individual seek external mentoring or receive some targeted guidance upon appointment. This reliance on informal learning highlights a significant gap in the training available to educational leaders and underscores the importance of personal insight, adaptability and resilience in these roles.

7.1.2 Proactive appointment and induction processes can play a crucial role in setting the relationship's tone through personalised interactions that build rapport and mutual understanding.

It also became apparent from the research that the appointment process can be a particularly transformative element in relationship formation. Far from constituting merely a procedural necessity, the way in which a headteacher or a CoG is selected can hold significant weight in shaping the tone, depth and trajectory of their subsequent professional relationship. This is particularly evident in the independent sector, where recruitment processes often allow for more informal

relational engagement. As was apparent from responses to RQ2, it is not uncommon for prospective candidates to be invited to informal dinners, extended school visits or bespoke meetings designed to assess interpersonal 'fit' alongside professional competence. Such early encounters facilitate the emergence of relational capital, enabling both parties to evaluate alignment in terms of vision, values and ethos. As noted by Robinson (2007), relational trust is a foundational element in effective educational leadership and the earlier this trust is cultivated, the more durable and productive the leadership partnership is likely to become.

Furthermore, early post-appointment contact, especially within the critical transitional period, can play a decisive role in reinforcing or recalibrating initial impressions. Initial overtures, such as a personal welcome, informal conversations or early collaborative planning sessions, can signal openness and a willingness to engage authentically. These moments are more than symbolic gestures, as they can affirm mutual commitment and reduce ambiguity about roles and expectations. As MacPhail et al (2024) argue, critical friendships and other forms of leadership collaboration rely on ongoing and honest dialogue. It also conveys the willingness of both parties to make time and space for the relationship. Modelling such open communication from the outset can accelerate the development of an effective working alliance. This is particularly pertinent given that early impressions often shape the cognitive and emotional schema through which enduring interactions are interpreted (Shuck et al, 2011).

In contrast, in more centralised procedures, such as those commonly found in MAT or LA appointments, these relational opportunities may be constrained by the need to standardise processes, thereby delaying or diluting the emergence of authentic connection. In such cases, both headteachers and CoGs may need to invest additional effort post-appointment to establish the relational foundations that more bespoke processes have been able to foster organically.

7.1.3 Consistent and meaningful communication, with trust as its cornerstone, is essential for building and sustaining the relationship.

Once the appointment is completed, the research shows that the development of the relationship relies on the nature and quality of ongoing communication. This is explored in part through the work of Barry and Crant (2000), who focus on the value of 'interactional richness', whereby the depth and quality of interpersonal interactions, in which individuals are able to express themselves fully and authentically, leads to more effective professional behaviours, which, in turn, enhance the postholders' overall impact on the organisation.

Regular contact, whether in the form of scheduled face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, or even impromptu visits, emerges as an essential mechanism for building and sustaining trust. The study illustrates that, when headteachers and CoGs set up a routine of regular interaction, often negotiated at the very beginning of their partnership, they create a stable platform for addressing both routine operational matters and more strategic, long-term issues. There was a consensus amongst participants that face-to-face meetings are particularly valuable, as they allow the subtle cues of body language and tone to complement verbal exchanges, lending depth to the dialogue that is difficult to replicate via online or telephone communication. Even when circumstances, such as the pandemic, force a temporary shift to online interactions, many participants reported that the quality of their connection suffered, emphasising how the physical presence of a colleague helps to reinforce the sense of shared purpose and commitment.

These regular meetings are not simply administrative check-ins but often possess a dual purpose. On the one hand, they serve the practical function of keeping the CoG informed about the day-to-day running of the school, enabling them to fulfil their oversight role and to communicate relevant insights back to the wider governing body. On the other, these interactions are opportunities for

headteachers to seek advice, share personal challenges and even express vulnerability. The balance struck in these meetings, between the exchange of operational information and the sharing of more personal concerns, appears to be a key factor in determining the strength and resilience of the relationship. When both parties are able to navigate this delicate balance, the relationship can evolve from a purely transactional arrangement into one that is genuinely supportive and mutually beneficial.

The study also highlights the need to maintain an appropriate balance between professional and personal boundaries. Many interviewees acknowledged that, whilst some level of personal connection is not only inevitable but also beneficial for creating an environment of openness and mutual support, there is a persistent tension in ensuring that this personal dimension does not compromise the accountability and objectivity required by the CoG's role. Some headteachers expressed relief in knowing that their CoG can offer not only strategic guidance but also a sense of camaraderie, often sharing personal anecdotes or engaging in casual social interactions outside the strictly formal meetings. However, this same closeness is sometimes viewed with caution, as there is a clear recognition that too much personal familiarity can risk undermining the professional authority of the headteacher or diluting the critical oversight function of the CoG. In effect, the study paints a picture of a relationship that is inherently dynamic, constantly negotiating the fine line between warmth and detachment, support and scrutiny, personal involvement and professional distance.

As shown throughout the research, trust was revealed to be the linchpin upon which the entire relationship rests. It is not something that is granted automatically but must be cultivated over time, often through a series of small, yet significant, gestures. Whether it is a headteacher confiding in the CoG about the real challenges of a high-pressure situation, or a CoG going out of their way to offer timely advice and support, these moments of connection gradually build what one participant referred to as 'trust credit'. In relationships where there has been pre-existing familiarity, such as previous encounters on school boards or

earlier roles in governance, the process of building trust can be accelerated, as there is already a reservoir of shared experience from which to draw. However, even in cases where the two parties start as strangers, consistent communication and a willingness to support each other in times of difficulty eventually lead to a robust bond.

Drawing on Mayer et al's (1995) model, the research highlights how perceptions of ability, benevolence and integrity shape the formation and maintenance of trust. It shows how trust is inherently relational and contingent, requiring participants to engage in calculated risk-taking and to demonstrate vulnerability. It is built through shared experiences and a degree of emotional openness; headteachers and CoGs who have developed a rapport that extends beyond the confines of formal meetings often reported a heightened sense of mutual support. For instance, some headteachers described being able to rely on their CoG not just for governance-related advice but also for a sympathetic ear during periods of personal stress. Due to its fluidity, trust is never static but continually negotiated and reinforced through action and interaction.

In contrast, there are relationships in which the emphasis remains almost exclusively on professional competence, with both parties deliberately maintaining a certain distance to avoid the complications that can arise from excessive familiarity. In these cases, whilst there may be an underlying respect and a clear division of roles, the absence of personal warmth is noted as both a potential strength, in that clear boundaries are more likely to be maintained, but also a possible limitation to the depth of the strategic partnership.

The study also emphasises the dynamic nature of the headteacher-CoG relationship, noting how it often evolves from a cautious, exploratory phase into a more cohesive and strategically aligned partnership. Initially centred on establishing shared values and expectations, this relationship tends to deepen over time as both individuals develop a clearer understanding of each other's working styles and begin to anticipate one another's needs. This progression is

typically accompanied by a growing interdependence that extends beyond routine operational matters. In some cases, this manifests in pre-meeting discussions aimed at aligning on key issues, thereby fostering a more unified and purposeful approach to board deliberations. Such collaboration becomes especially critical during periods of crisis, when the demands on leadership intensify.

7.1.4 'Critical friend', although controversial, remains a recognised concept, describing a relationship where professional demands are tempered by personal warmth and empathy.

RQ4 sought to examine how far headteachers and CoGs recognised and supported the phrase 'critical friend'. While the term was widely recognised by participants, its interpretation was often contested. Headteachers generally acknowledged its relevance, viewing it as an accurate, if somewhat imperfect, descriptor of the balance between challenge and support inherent in their interactions with CoGs. However, some expressed reservations about the connotations of 'critical', perceiving it as potentially adversarial, preferring instead to view the CoG's role as one of constructive dialogue aimed at institutional improvement rather than personal critique. In general, CoGs were more divided, with some rejecting the term outright, on the grounds that 'critical' failed to encapsulate their fundamentally supportive function, with others arguing that 'friend' inappropriately implied a level of personal familiarity incompatible with professional governance.

Despite these reservations, both headteachers and CoGs within the sample recognised that challenge is most effective when embedded within a framework of trust and respect. Some headteachers regarded their CoG as a key ally, who provided rigorous yet measured scrutiny, whereas others maintained a more detached and professional perspective. In light of these different viewpoints, alternative terms, such as 'supportive challenger' and 'strategic partner', could perhaps be considered as more accurate and palatable articulations of the role.

7.1.5 Suggestions of confusion over the boundary between operational and strategic responsibility can be overplayed.

The inclusion of RQ5 aimed to investigate the extent to which tensions, or even outright conflict, might arise between headteachers and CoGs due to misunderstandings about the boundary between operational and strategic responsibilities. However, amongst the relationships examined in this study, there was little evidence to suggest that either party lacked clarity on this distinction: in fact, concerns about blurred or misunderstood boundaries were minimal. Several headteachers were not only comfortable with their CoGs engaging in discussions around operational matters but actively welcomed their perspectives, recognising the value such input could bring. In other instances, CoGs took the initiative to liaise with senior leaders on issues that, whilst operational in nature, were seen to bear directly on strategic priorities. These actions were rarely contested and, in some cases, encouraged, particularly when they contributed to the broader strategic vision.

This points to a deeper insight: challenges in governance may stem less from ambiguity around roles and more from the absence of strong relational foundations. When mutual trust is present, both individuals demonstrate a greater capacity to engage flexibly with both strategic and operational issues, often resulting in more effective decision-making and school leadership. As such, the findings suggest a shift in emphasis may be warranted, away from rigid adherence to role definitions and toward the cultivation of collaborative relationships. The most effective partnerships observed were those in which headteachers and CoGs navigated traditional role boundaries with confidence, united by a shared sense of purpose and mutual respect.

7.1.6 Researching relationships from both independent and state-funded sectors revealed how close and impactful relationships exist in both but that the developing structural complexity in schools within MATs is making it less likely for such relationships to flourish.

Including relationships between headteachers and CoGs from both independent and state-funded schools was a distinctive methodological feature of this research. It was unusual because the independent sector in England is rarely examined by academics, especially in relation to governance, and even more rarely considered alongside the state-funded sector. This approach strengthened the study by highlighting the potential of these relationships when not restricted by external expectations or structural constraints. Relationship C, for instance, developed successfully due to the positive interaction and adaptability of those involved, afforded to them by the freedom and flexibility of the institution. This kind of freedom was not limited to the independent sector though. Relationship F also showed a high level of independence and mutual trust, something that they were also able to engineer organically though their own interactions. However, School F was part of a single academy trust and it became clear from other examples, such as Relationship G, that, once a school is absorbed into a MAT structure, it can become harder for either party to maintain that same level of autonomy and responsiveness. The relationship also loses value in comparison to those the headteacher has with others, such as executives from the MAT. It is therefore possible that headteacher-CoG relationships in the state-funded sector will become more formal, distant and limited, whilst those in the independent sector continue to grow closer, be more flexible and, consequently, more impactful, due to the schools' operational independence.

7.1.7 Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolving relationship between headteachers and CoGs.

This thesis has demonstrated the value of using LMX as a theoretical lens through which to explore and understand the complex relationship between headteachers and CoGs. This is due to its ability to offer a flexible framework for examining how these relationships function and develop over time. Most importantly, it demonstrates how relationships, at their best, are based, not on two individuals acting as sole agents in isolation but on two active participants in a process of exchange, where information, trust and confidence is given, received and reciprocated on a continuous loop. The research includes multiple examples of this occurring, often to surprising and striking effect.

LMX also acknowledges the wide range of factors and influences – some within the control of the dyad, others outside – that interact constantly to either accelerate or inhibit the relationship's development. The LMX life cycle (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) outlines how relationships tend to evolve through identifiable stages (stranger, acquaintance and maturity), each marked by changes in interactional tone, communication patterns and relational expectations. Positive communication patterns and 'accelerant events', such as moments of shared success or mutual support in times of challenge, further deepen trust and relational closeness; the absence of such moments or the presence of negative interactions can stall or even reverse relational development. Recognition and support from others within the leadership and governance structures can also act as catalysts for relationship enhancement. High-quality LMX relationships support a positive self-concept, enhancing individuals' sense of competence and engagement in their roles, whereas low-quality relationships may diminish motivation and erode confidence.

However, the study diverges from the LMX framework, which typically emphasises a clear leader-follower hierarchy. In contrast, the interactions between headteachers and CoGs observed here reflect a more fluid and reciprocal dynamic,

wherein both parties assume aspects of leadership and followership depending on the context. Drawing on theories of self-concept and Foucault's writings on power dynamics, the research demonstrates how LMX can be applied to more complex relational structures, where authority is exercised in more subtle, distributed forms. Rather than hindering the development of the relationship, the blurring of roles appears to strengthen it, provided that these shifts occur within a foundation of mutual trust and confidence. The findings indicate that within such a relational climate, ambiguity in leader-follower identity is not only tolerated but can be positively embraced, so long as there is a shared sense of purpose and collective direction underpinning the collaboration.

7.2 Reflections on the methodological approach taken and on my positionality as a researcher.

There were two principal dilemmas at the outset of this research. The first concerned the focus of the study. Although I was certain that I wanted to explore the relationship between headteachers and CoGs, it was initially unclear where the boundaries of this enquiry should lie. I was drawn more to the concept of 'governing' rather than 'governance': in other words, to the lived, relational aspects of leadership rather than its structural or procedural dimensions. However, I was also acutely aware that this relationship does not operate in a vacuum. It is embedded within, and shaped by, wider institutional and historical forces, such as school culture, the dynamics of governing bodies and the external agendas set by MATs or government policy.

In turn, in wishing to take on board this broader context, I began to consider complexity theory as a possible theoretical lens. My belief was that the relationship could not be understood in isolation from these surrounding factors. It was for this reason that I initially proposed a mixed-methods approach. I intended to examine the relationship itself through qualitative semi-structured interviews with a sample of independent and state-funded school headteachers and to address wider

structural and contextual variables through a quantitative survey distributed to headteachers and CoGs.

Whilst this approach seemed, in theory, both comprehensive and data-rich, several problems soon emerged. Some of these were logistical: for example, the low likelihood of obtaining a meaningful response rate from the surveys. Others were methodological, with the question of how I could compare and synthesise data drawn from fundamentally different approaches. As the research progressed, a moment of clarity began to take shape. What had started as a broad investigation gradually narrowed in focus, with increasing attention paid to the relationship itself: its workings, its significance and its role within leadership and governance. This growing awareness marked a subtle but important shift in how the study developed, influencing both the design and the kinds of insights that began to emerge.

As a result, I abandoned the mixed-methods model in favour of a fully qualitative approach, expanding the number of semi-structured interviews and using these as the sole data collection method. This decision was vindicated as the research progressed. The interviews proved to be exceptionally enlightening, not only in terms of what participants said but also how they said it: their choice of language, their emotional responses and even their physical demeanour often conveyed insights that extended beyond their spoken experiences. The depth of these interactions led me towards a phenomenological stance, as I began to see that what was most striking across the eight interview sets was not the institutional context but the phenomenon of the relationship itself.

The move towards phenomenology was solidified through the adoption of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I recognised that bracketing my own perspective entirely from the research was neither possible nor, in fact, desirable. My prior experience as a headteacher was frequently acknowledged by participants, who made references to situations they assumed I would understand. Rather than seeing this as a threat to objectivity, I came to regard it as a

strength. In some cases, I leaned into this shared professional identity, which, I believe, helped to establish rapport and foster trust.

Participants appeared more comfortable and forthcoming, perhaps reassured by the sense that I understood the nature of their roles and the challenges they faced. I also believe it enhanced their confidence in my discretion and sensitivity to issues of confidentiality. Far from compromising the integrity of the research, my positionality arguably enriched it, enabling a level of openness that may not have been possible with a researcher perceived as an outsider. While some might argue that this closeness risks introducing bias (particularly a greater sympathy towards headteachers), I would contend that it also enabled a more textured and authentic account of the relationship in question.

The way the methodology developed over time reflected not just theoretical considerations but also the practical demands of the research process. What began as a broad, complexity-informed mixed-methods design gradually shifted toward a more focused, phenomenological approach. This change brought the study into closer alignment with its core aims and opened up space for a more sensitive and layered understanding of the relationship at its centre. Looking back, I see my own positionality not as a limitation but as something that added depth. It offered a lens through which the human dynamics within these leadership partnerships could be better understood.

7.3 How the results of the research have been disseminated to date and how I intend to present these in future.

The findings of this study have been presented on the following occasions:

May 2023: Presentation at the Annual PGR Conference, University of Nottingham School of Education (UoNSoE).

May 2024: Presentation at the Annual PGR Conference, UoNSoE.

May 2024: Presentation at the Education Studies Postgraduate Conference, University of Warwick.

May 2024: Presentation to a visiting group of academics and students from East China Normal University, at the invitation of UoNSoE.

July 2024: Paper presentation at the BELMAS Annual Conference in Glasgow.

I have also discussed and disseminated my research findings at a range of meetings and seminars, such as through the BELMAS Governing and Governance RIG, for which I have also featured in a podcast, to be broadcast in September 2025, alongside Rosemary Hoyle, who is also currently researching the headteacher-CoG relationship (through the University of Lincoln).

On completion of the thesis, it is my plan to write articles for journals such as 'Educational Management Administration & Leadership' and 'Management in Education', as well as continuing to research and disseminate my findings. It is also my ambition to work further with Rosemary Hoyle, given that we bring to the topic different perspectives, as she was previously a CoG and a non-executive Chair of a charity and my background is as an educational leader and practitioner.

7.4 Practical recommendations for how the findings from this study can be used to improve the headteacher-CoG relationship.

The findings of the study suggest that, by investing in the relational dynamics that underpin effective leadership, schools can create a more supportive and collaborative culture that ultimately benefits everyone involved. In a world where educational challenges are ever more complex and demanding, the ability of a headteacher and their CoG to work together seamlessly will be one of the most

significant determinants of success, illustrating that, at the heart of every well-run school, lies a relationship built on mutual respect and a shared vision for the future.

7.4.1 Induction and training should be provided for both headteachers and CoGs as to how to conduct their relationship.

Given the evidence that both headteachers and CoGs often enter into their roles with little, if any, specific preparation for this relationship, it is recommended that formalised induction programmes be developed and implemented as standard practice across the education sector. Such induction should go beyond operational and procedural content to focus on emotional intelligence, communication styles, leadership alignment and conflict resolution. At best, such preparation should be co-constructed and ideally co-attended, fostering shared understanding from the outset and allowing for the collaborative negotiation of roles, expectations and working practices.

7.4.2 Appointment processes, for both headteachers and CoGs, should become more relationally oriented.

The research affirms that the relational tone of the headteacher-CoG partnership can be significantly shaped during the appointment process. It is therefore suggested that the process of appointing headteachers and CoGs should extend beyond evaluations based solely on competencies and prior experience. Instead, it should incorporate at least some opportunity to assess for the quality of personal interaction and the alignment of values between headteacher and CoG. Schools and governing bodies should consider embedding relational assessment stages, such as informal one-to-one meetings and initial discussions about strategy, into the appointment process. Furthermore, early post-appointment contact should be formalised as a critical transitional phase, with scheduled interactions aimed at

deepening rapport and clarifying joint priorities. Where appointment processes are centrally administered, it would be advantageous if there was some flexibility to allow for relational encounters alongside procedural uniformity.

7.4.3 Protocols regarding communication should be established early in the relationship, in order to build trust from the outset, with 'contracting' as a potential mechanism for achieving this.

A consistent finding of this research is that meaningful and regular communication underpins trust, which is the foundational element of the headteacher-CoG relationship. It is therefore recommended that schools implement clearly defined communication protocols to ensure regularity, openness and confidentiality in their interactions. These should include scheduled one-to-one meetings, flexible informal check-ins and agreed-upon practices for communicating during periods of heightened stress or crisis. Training on dialogic communication practices, active listening and the strategic use of feedback should be embedded into leadership development programmes. Moreover, attention must be given to the medium of communication: whilst digital tools have their place, face-to-face interaction should be prioritised, wherever feasible, due to its greater capacity for emotional subtlety and relational depth.

Consideration should be given to 'contracting' the relationship, which is 'an agreement made between two or more people concerning the type of activity or relationship they will have with each other' (Sills, 2006: 13) as a way of at least establishing some ground rules and shared understandings. Although Sills was relating this to the world of counselling and psychotherapy, she considered its wider usage: 'Human society is founded on explicit and implicit agreements about how we can live in relationship with another. They are one of the ways that we try to put order into a world that is essentially unpredictable and potentially dangerous.' Sills recognises, however, that no relationship can be completely 'contracted', otherwise that would inhibit creativity and prevent it from

progressing. She therefore arrives at a satisfactory 'mid-point' she calls 'bounded instability' or a defined relationship within which spontaneous and innovative interaction is allowed to flourish.

7.4.4 The term 'Critical Friend' should be refined and developed.

Although the term 'critical friend' remains contested, this study supports its continued use, albeit with clearer conceptual boundaries. It is recommended that school governance frameworks explicitly define the critical friend role as one that blends challenge with empathetic support, emphasising its potential to foster reflective practice and mutual learning. Training materials for governors and school leaders could incorporate case studies and exemplar scenarios that describe this dual function, helping leaders navigate the often-blurred boundaries between scrutiny and support. Consideration could also be given to the use of alternative terms, such as 'strategic partner' or 'supportive challenger', if it is felt that 'critical friend' has outlived its usefulness.

7.4.5 Structured mentoring schemes and peer support networks should be established for both headteachers and CoGs.

So as to gain the most from high-functioning relationships elsewhere, schools should be encouraged to establish peer support networks as part of their governance and leadership systems. These networks should be tailored to specific contexts and roles, recognising the unique yet interlinked responsibilities of headteachers and CoGs. By design, they would provide a confidential and constructive environment for participants to navigate the complexities of their roles.

These networks could fulfil various purposes. They could serve as opportunities for sharing best practices, offering valuable insights into how strong relationships

between headteachers and CoGs are formed and maintained in different scenarios. Additionally, they could provide an opening for reflective supervision, enabling participants to evaluate critically their own behaviours and decision-making within a supportive space. By focusing on interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, these networks would contribute to the enhancement of individuals' relational capabilities.

Moreover, experienced dyads could take on mentoring roles to support newer or less confident colleagues. Through their example, they could demonstrate effective communication, boundary-setting and collaborative problem-solving, showcasing practical applications of relational leadership. Their guidance could be particularly beneficial during periods of change or tension, offering both practical advice and reassurance. Integrating such networks into school leadership practices would help foster a culture of deliberate and relationally informed growth, improving the overall strength and adaptability of governance relationships whatever the nature or context of the school.

7.4.6 As part of headteacher appraisal and governance review, there should be a specific focus on the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG.

It is recommended that both headteacher appraisal processes and governance reviews place greater emphasis on the quality and dynamics of the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG. Given the centrality of this relationship to effective school leadership and governance, its health and functionality should not be taken for granted nor treated as incidental. Instead, structured reflection and evaluation of this partnership should become a core component of both individual performance reviews and collective governance assessments. This would involve not only how each individual performs their specific role but would also examine how mutual support is fostered and sustained over time. By making this relational dimension an explicit focus, schools and governing bodies can more effectively

identify areas for development, prevent potential tensions and ensure that leadership functions, both operational and strategic, are undertaken in a collaborative and coherent manner. Such an approach acknowledges that the effectiveness of governance is not solely a matter of compliance or procedural rigour but is also deeply relational and therefore warrants particular review and support.

7.4.7 LMX has the potential to be used as a diagnostic and developmental tool in leadership relationships.

It is recommended that LMX be made use of as a diagnostic tool for assessing relational development and as a developmental guide for improving partnership quality. Governance development programmes, whether targeted at new leaders or experienced practitioners, could incorporate training on the core phases of the LMX framework. Using this knowledge, headteachers and CoGs could then be encouraged to evaluate the current stage of their own relationship, consider what supports or hinders its progression and identify potential strategies for developing trust and communication further. Viewing the headteacher-CoG relationship through the lens of LMX enables leaders to recognise signs of relational stagnation and, by identifying these patterns early, targeted interventions can be introduced to reinvigorate the relationship and move it towards a more mature and effective phase. In this way, LMX becomes not just a conceptual framework but a practical toolkit for relational leadership.

In addition, the ASPIRE framework (Roffey, 2016) offers a complementary evaluative structure for assessing the relational health of governance partnerships. While LMX focuses on the developmental trajectory of the relationship, ASPIRE provides a set of relational values that can guide day-to-day interactions and inform the ethical climate of the dyad. Together, these frameworks allow for a holistic assessment of the headteacher-CoG relationship and can serve as

foundational components in the ongoing professional development of school leaders and governors alike.

7.5 Suggestions for how this and other school leadership relationships could be researched in future.

7.5.1 A longitudinal research design could potentially provide a more authoritative account of how the headteacher-CoG relationship develops over time.

Whilst this study was primarily designed as a cross-sectional investigation, elements of a longitudinal perspective were nonetheless present. During interviews, participants frequently referred to past experiences and reflected on the development of their relationships over time. These retrospective accounts provided insight into changes and continuities, revealing how relationships had evolved across different phases, albeit through anecdote and memory rather than structured longitudinal tracking.

A longitudinal research method is particularly useful for exploring the development of a leadership relationship because it captures the dynamic and evolving nature of such relationships. As Bauer and Green (1996) argue, LMX is not a static construct but one that unfolds through ongoing interactions, evaluations and exchanges. The quality of LMX is the result of cumulative effects of a developmental process, underscoring the value of tracking variables over multiple time points to understand their long-term impacts. Future research into the headteacher-CoG relationship would therefore benefit significantly from a formalised longitudinal design. Ideally, such a study would begin at the relationship's inception, capturing early interactions and expectations, and would continue at regular intervals over an extended period. This would allow for a more

systematic exploration of how relationships evolve, particularly through the stages of the LMX life cycle.

By tracking these transitions in 'real time', researchers would be better positioned to identify not only when and how these shifts occur but also the contextual and interpersonal factors that facilitate or hinder progression. Moreover, informing participants about the conceptual framework of LMX stages may introduce a metacognitive element to the research. Participants' awareness of the relational 'journey' they are part of could yield more novel insights, as they reflect on and interpret their own development within the relationship. This self-awareness might also influence their behaviour and relational strategies, offering an additional dimension to explore.

Such a design would provide a richer, and potentially more sophisticated, understanding of the dynamics at play in professional relationships and would offer stronger empirical grounding for the theoretical models that seek to explain them.

7.5.2 Research could be undertaken using a larger sample size and a mixed-methods approach, in order to deepen and enhance our understanding of the headteacher-CoG relationship in a wider variety of contexts.

While the sample used in this study was relatively small, it yielded a wealth of data that has led to substantial and wide-ranging conclusions about this relationship. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations posed by the sample size and composition. One potential criticism is that the sample may appear somewhat idiosyncratic, given that it encompassed a broad range of educational contexts, from an independent single-sex school to a mixed comprehensive within a MAT. Whilst this diversity added depth and variation to the data, it may also raise questions about the representativeness and

generalizability of the findings. A further criticism could also be that the sample was derived from personal and indirect connections and that affected my independence as a researcher.

Future research would therefore benefit from engaging a larger and more systematically compiled sample, including a wider range of school types, geographical regions, governance structures and demographic contexts. By increasing the number of participants and broadening the sampling framework, researchers would not only strengthen the external validity of the findings but also allow for more granular analysis of how specific contextual factors, such as institutional size, ethos and culture, can shape the headteacher-CoG relationship. Importantly, if similar patterns and themes were to emerge from a larger and more diverse sample, this would serve to reinforce the credibility and applicability of the conclusions already drawn, adding depth and complexity to the analysis.

In addition to expanding the sample, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach. This was in fact my original intention, as I believed that integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods would provide a broader evidential base and potentially enhance the perceived robustness of the findings. While this study focused on in-depth qualitative interviews, supplementing this with survey data could provide a valuable complementary perspective. Even if the quantitative data derived from such surveys was more general or descriptive in nature, it could help identify larger patterns and correlations, thereby situating the qualitative insights within a wider frame.

To implement such an approach, collaboration with key professional associations would be essential. Following the publication of this research, I would seek to engage with national bodies such as the NGA in the state sector and AGBIS in the independent sector. These organisations could support the distribution of a structured survey targeting both headteachers and CoGs across a broad cross-section of schools. This would enable the collection of a large-scale data set,

which could then be analysed alongside a wider-ranging qualitative study of leadership-governance dyads.

The core format of interviewing headteachers and CoGs in tandem, which is a distinctive feature of the present study, would likely remain a central component of any future research, as it proved to be highly effective in eliciting sophisticated dialogic insights into the relational dynamics at play. However, scaling up this aspect of the research would allow for greater variation and potentially reveal subtler distinctions or previously unrecognised patterns.

Given the strength and coherence of the findings to date, I would not expect further research to fundamentally challenge the core tenets of the study or the appropriateness of LMX as the conceptual lens. Rather, an expanded and more methodologically varied approach would serve to refine and lend further authority to the conclusions drawn.

7.5.3 Further research into the headteacher-CoG relationship could be used to develop LMX as a conceptual lens in the study of high-level executive relationships, where leader and follower roles are less clearly defined and often shared.

This research was significantly enriched by the adoption of LMX as a theoretical lens, as it provided a coherent and structured framework through which the evolving nature of each relationship could be analysed. It offered a scaffold that helped to frame observations, identify recurring patterns and assess relational development across a spectrum of exchanges. In particular, LMX's life cycle proved to be a helpful tool in evaluating the maturity and quality of each dyad. It allowed for a form of comparative analysis, whereby relational dynamics could be understood not only individually but also in terms of their relative developmental direction.

The choice to apply LMX in this context draws on a growing body of research that has extended its application beyond traditional supervisor-subordinate relationships. Although originally developed within formal hierarchical structures, the theory has since been adapted to suit environments where leadership roles are more flexible and less clearly defined. This study continues in that direction. The headteacher and CoG may not form a textbook example of the leader-follower pairing found in early LMX models but their relationship offers valuable insights when examined through this lens. Both individuals frequently alternate between guiding and supporting, depending on the context and the phase of organisational development. This mutual influence and shared accountability point to a more collaborative and co-constructed relationship. In such cases, LMX, particularly in its more contemporary interpretations, proves increasingly relevant. Future research could expand on this by examining not only the headteacher-CoG relationship in greater detail but also a broader range of senior professional partnerships where leadership is collective and authority is shared. Examples include leadership teams at the executive level, co-headships or cross-sector collaborations, where decision-making is negotiated rather than imposed.

To enhance the richness and applicability of such investigations, future work could adopt a more explicitly case study-based methodology. This would allow for a more holistic examination of each relationship by incorporating the perspectives of other key stakeholders who both influence and are influenced by the headteacher-CoG dynamic. These might include senior leadership team members, governors, external advisors or MAT and LA representatives. Including such voices would provide important contextual texture, helping to map how the dyad operates within a broader relational environment.

Ultimately, a key ambition of such future research would be to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing evolution of LMX. As the number of its variants grows, there remains an opportunity, even a need, to develop a version of LMX that can better account for complex, high-status and multi-dimensional executive relationships. Such a version would ideally be capable not only of explaining the

relational dynamics at play but also of offering practical tools for assessing and enhancing them. If justified and empirically validated, this extended model could serve as a valuable framework for promoting excellence in leadership partnerships, particularly in contexts where clarity of role and power is both contested and shared.

7.6 Concluding comments regarding the thesis.

As described in Chapter 1, the initial motivation for this research arose from a challenging period in my professional career. What stood out for me most during that time was a deep sense of isolation. I had expected the CoG to offer personal support and to stand alongside me when challenges arose. Instead, that support was noticeably absent, leaving me feeling adrift, caught in a kind of void where leadership felt both exposed and unsupported. This experience closely echoes the observations of Gibson and Simon (2018), who highlight how quickly the backing of governors, and particularly CoGs, can shift. What begins as an ostensibly supportive relationship can rapidly turn, leaving school leaders vulnerable, as former allies become distant or even antagonistic. It was this erosion of support that most powerfully shaped my experience at the time, although, on reflection, I can appreciate how the relationship had always been frail and conditional. My ambition within the research was therefore to understand how such relationships can develop a depth and resilience to sustain both participants in good times and bad. Alongside this, I also sought to contribute to an understanding of the impact that relational leadership can play in all work settings, to the betterment of the individuals concerned and the organisations they serve.

I believe the research does this in two meaningful ways. The first is through the gathering and presentation of detailed and honest interview material. While I expected participants to provide useful insights, I had not anticipated the depth of feeling and the openness that many headteachers and CoGs brought to the conversations. Their willingness to speak about both uplifting and difficult

experiences gave rare insight into a relationship that is often kept private. Many of their reflections were not only helpful from an analytical point of view but also deeply affecting. That is why I chose to include many of their words verbatim. I wanted to preserve the clarity and emotional weight of their voices without reducing them to paraphrased summaries. From what I have seen in the current body of research, such openness from both headteachers and CoGs is not commonly documented. I hope this thesis helps fill that gap by sharing these experiences in a way that feels both respectful and revealing.

The second key contribution, from my perspective, is the use and adaptation of the LMX framework within this specific context. Although it was originally designed for more traditional workplace hierarchies, the framework proved to be a helpful way to explore the complexities of executive relationships in schools. I have argued that, despite the unique features of the headteacher-CoG relationship, LMX still provides a meaningful structure. It offers a way to track how these relationships evolve, stagnate or, in some cases, deteriorate. More than just a theoretical tool, it can help clarify the behaviours and expectations that shape each phase of the relationship. If this model is further refined and shared with a wider audience, I believe it could become a practical resource for those in school leadership and governance. It might ease some of the self-doubt that professionals often carry, whilst also encouraging more open communication and better mutual understanding.

With this in mind, I feel proud of what this research represents. I believe it brings something new to academic discussions but I also hope it proves useful within the professional world. If the work can provide some insight, a sense of connection or even just reassurance for those navigating high-level leadership roles in schools, then I will consider the endeavour to have been worthwhile.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, M. (2023). Ruth Perry 'amazed' more heads did not kill themselves, inquest hears. The Guardian. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/dec/01/ruth-perry-was-amazed-other-heads-didnt-kill-themselves-inquest-hears. [Accessed 17th May 2025.]

Allen, A., & Gann, N. (2022). The architecture of school governance: Rebuilding democratic legitimacy within an academized system. *Management in Education*, *36* (1), 11-17.

Aristotle. (1936). *Ethica Nicomachea*. Translated by Niels Møller. Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 145-166.

Ashforth, B. E., & Schinoff, B. S. (2016). Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 3*, 111-137.

Ashworth, P. (2015). Conceptual foundations of qualitative psychology. In J.A. Smith (ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods.* SAGE Publications.

AoC. (2014). *Guidance note: What does it mean to be a critical friend?* London: Association of Colleges. Available from: https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/Being%20a%20critical%20friend_0.pdf. [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

AoC. (2019). *The English colleges' foundation code of governance*. London: Association of Colleges. Available from: https://www.aoc.co.uk/funding-and-corporate-services/governance/governance-resources/code-good-governance-english-colleges. [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

Bakhtin, M. (1996). *Speech genres and other late essays.* (Translated by V.W. McGee.) Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. (2002). *The dialogical imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin.* (Translated by M. Holquist.) Austin: University of Texas Press.

Balarin, M., Brammar, S., James, C., & McCormack, M. (2008). *Governing our Schools: a research study commissioned by Business in the Community*. London: Business in the Community.

Ball, S. (2012). *The micro-politics of the school: Towards a theory of school organization*. Routledge.

Barsade, S., & Gibson, D. (2007). Why does affect matter in organisations? *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *2 (1),* 36-59

Barry, B., & Crant, J. M. (2000). Dyadic communication relationships in organizations: An attribution/expectancy approach. *Organizational Science, 11* (6), 648–664.

Bass, B. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations.* New York: The Free Press.

Bauer, T.N., & Green, S.G. (1996). Development of leader-member exchange: A longitudinal test. *Academy of Management Journal, 39* (6), 1538-1567.

Baxter, J. A., & Cornforth, C. (2021). Governing collaborations: How boards engage with their communities in multi-academy trusts in England. *Public Management Review, 23* (4), 567–589.

Biesta, G. (2007). Why 'what works' won't work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory, 57* (1), 1–22.

Bolam, R. (2004). Reflections on the NCSL, from a historical perspective. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership, 32*, 3, 251-268.

Bossert, S., Dwyer, D., Rowan, B., & Lee, G. (1982). The Instructional Management Role of the Principal. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 18* (3), 34-64.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

Boyd, R. (1998). *Independent Schools – Law, Custom and Practice*. Bristol: Jordans.

Brewer, M.B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who Is This "We"? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71* (1), 83-93.

Brighouse, T., & Woods, D. (2013). *The A-Z of School Improvement: Principles and Practice.* London: Bloomsbury Educational.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Doing Interviews.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brower, H.H., Scoorman, F.D., & Tan H.H. (2000). A Model of Relational Leadership: The Integration of Trust and Leader-Member Exchange. *Leadership Quarterly, 11,* (2), 227-250.

Bubb, S., & Earley, P. (2013). Governing bodies and effective schools*. School Leadership & Management, 33* (1), 3–5.

Buber, M. ([1923] 2002). *Between man and man.* (Translated by R. Gregor-Smith.) London: Routledge.

Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1987). Validation and measurement of the fundamental themes of relational communication. *Communication Monographs, 54* (1), 19–41.

Burton, B. (2000). Antecedents and consequences of corporate governance structure. *Corporate Governance: An International Review, 8* (3), 194–203.

Bush, T. (2020). *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2014). School leadership models: what do we know? *School Leadership & Management, 34 (5),* 553-571.

Cadbury, A. (1992). *Report of the committee on the financial aspects of corporate governance*. London: Gee.

Camic, P. M., Rhodes, J. E., & Yardley, L. (eds.). (2003). *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*. American Psychological Association.

Carminati, L. (2018). Generalizability in qualitative research: A tale of two traditions. *Qualitative Health Research, 28* (13), 2094–2101.

Chang, C.-H. (D.), & Johnson, R. E. (2010). Not all leader–member exchanges are created equal: Importance of leader relational identity. *The Leadership Quarterly, 21* (5), 796–808.

Charity Commission. (2018). *The essential trustee: What you need to know, what you need to do.* HM Government.

Clark, M. S., J. Mills. (1993). The difference between communal and exchange relationships: What it is and is not. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19 684-691.

Clarkson, P., & Shaw, P. (1992). Human relationships at work in organisations. *Management Education and Development, 23,* 18-29.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.

Colbert, A., Bono, J., & Purvanova, R. (2016). Flourishing via workplace relationships: Moving beyond instrumental support. *Academy of Management Journal, 59,* 1199–1223.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94* (Supplement), 95–120.

Connolly, M. & James, C. (2022). Developing and proposing rational and valid principles for effective school governance in England. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50*, 2, 1-18.

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (1993). Through the lens of a critical friend. *Educational Leadership, 51* (2), 49–51.

Crawford, M. (2009). *Getting to the heart of leadership: Emotion and educational leadership*. SAGE Publications.

Crawford, M. (2012). Solo and group leadership: Headteachers' perceptions of autonomy and teamwork. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40* (5), 603–621.

Croner-i (2021) *Governance in Independent Schools*. London: Croner-i. Accessed from: https://app.croneri.co.uk/topics/governance-independent-schools/indepth?product=144. [Accessed 21st April 2022.]

Cunliffe, A.L., & Eriksen, M. (2011). Relational leadership. *Human Relations, 64, (11),* 1425-1449.

Curry, M. (2008). Critical friends groups: The possibilities and limitations embedded in teacher professional communities aimed at instructional improvement and school reform. *Teachers College Record, 110* (4), 733-774.

Dadhich, A., & Bhal, K.T. (2008). Ethical Leader Behaviour and Leader-Member Exchange as Predictors of Subordinate Behaviours. *Vikalpa, 33, (4)*, 15-25.

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1984). Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organizational design. In L. L. Cummings, & B. M. Staw, (eds.) *Research in Organizational Behavior*. JAI Press: Greenwich, CT.

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science*, 32, 554-571.

Daloz, L. (1986). *Effective Mentoring and Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dansereau, F., Graen, G.B., & Haga, W. (1975). A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership in formal organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 13,* 46-78.

Delmar, C. (2010). 'Generalizability' as recognition: Reflections on a foundational problem in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies, 1,* 115-128.

DfE. (2012). The Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2012. Available from: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/115/pdfs/uksi_20120115_en.pdf. [Accessed 18th May 2025.]

DfE. (2013). *The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013.* London: Department for Education. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270783/school_governance_regulations_2013_departmental_advice.pdf [Accessed 8th December 2021.]

DfE. (2014a, updated annually). *Keeping children safe in education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges*. HM Government. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf. [Accessed 27th May 2025.]

DfE. (2014b). *Leading governors: The role of the chair of governors in schools and academies*. HM Government.

DfE. (2017). *Recruiting a Headteacher*. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/668949/Recruiting-a-headteacher-v2.pdf. [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

DfE. (2020a). *Governance Handbook*. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925104/Governance_Handbook_FINAL.pdf [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

DfE. (2020b) Headteachers' Standards 2020. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-of-excellence-for-headteachers/headteachers-standards-2020. [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

DfE. (2021). *Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges.* HM Government. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges. [Accessed 27th May 2025.]

DfE. (2022). *Opportunity for all - Strong schools with great teachers for your child.* HM Government. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62416cb5d3bf7f32add7819f/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child__print_version_.pdf. [Accessed 27th May 2025.]

DfE. (2023). *Academy trust handbook 2023.* HM Government. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/667d3082aec8650b100900c3/Academy_trust_handbook_2023.pdf. [Accessed 27th May 2025.]

Dik, B.J., Byrne, Z.S., & Steger, M.F. (2013). *Purpose and meaning in the workplace.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Dingle, R. (2000). *Effective Governors - effective schools? A study of governor effectiveness and its association with school effectiveness.* EdD Thesis: University of Newcastle.

Doherty, J., MacBeath, J., Jardine, S., Smith, I., & McCall, J. (2001). Do schools need critical friends? *Improving School Effectiveness*, 138–151.

Dunn, R. (2025). The Role of the Critical Friend in Supporting Principals to Lead School Improvement. *Educational Process: International Journal, 14*, 1-12.

Dutton, J.E. (2014). Build high quality connections. In J.E. Dutton & G.M. Spreitzer (eds.), *How to be a Positive Leader: Small Actions Big Impact.* San Fransisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Dutton, J. E., Roberts, L. M., & Bednar, J. (2010). Pathways for positive identity construction at work: Four types of positive identity and the building of social resources. *Academy of Management Review, 35*, 265–293.

Dutton, J.E., & Spreitzer, G.M. (eds.) (2014). *How to be a positive leader: Small actions, big impact.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Earley, P., & Weindling, D. (2004). *Understanding school leadership*. Paul Chapman Publishing.

Education Act 2002. (2002). Available from: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents. [Accessed 8th December 2021.]

Epitropaki, O., Kark, R., Mainemelis, C., & Lord, R.G. (2017). Leadership and follower identity processes: a multilevel review. *Leadership Quarterly, 28, (1)*, 104-129.

Equality Act 2010. (2010). Available from: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents. [Accessed 3rd July 2025.]

Erdogan, B., & Bauer, T.N. (2015). Leader-Member Exchange Theory. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2nd edition,* (13), 641-647.

Evetts, J. (2014). The Concept of Professionalism: Professional Work, Professional Practice and Learning. In: Billett, S., Harteis, C., Gruber, H. (eds.) *International Handbook of Research in Professional and Practice-based Learning*. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Dordrecht: Springer.

Exworthy, M. & Robinson, R. (2001). Two at the top: relations between the chairs and chief executives in the NHS. *Health services management research, 14*, 82-91.

FRC (Financial Reporting Council). (2018). *UK Corporate Governance Code*. Available from: https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/88bd8c45-50ea-4841-95b0-d2f4f48069a2/2018-UK-Corporate-Governance-Code-FINAL.pdf. [Accessed 26th May 2025.]

Fletcher, G. J. O., & Fincham, F. D. (1991). Attribution processes in close relationships. In G. J. O. Fletcher & F. D. Fincham (eds.), *Cognition in close relationships*. Erlbaum.

Forbes, D., & Milliken, F. (1999). Cognition and corporate governance: Understanding boards of directors as strategic decision-making groups. *Academy of Management Review, 24* (3), 489–505.

Foucault, M. (1976). *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-79*, (ed. Gordon, C.). New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1994). *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Press.

Freidson, E. (2001). *Professionalism: The Third Logic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Gabarro, J.J. (1990). The development of working relationships. In J. Gallegher, R.E. Kraut & C. Egido, (eds.) *Intellectual Teamwork: Social and Technological Foundations of Cooperative Work*. Erlbaum: Hillsdale, NJ.

Gambetta, D. G. (Ed.). (1988). Can we trust trust?. In D. G. Gambetta (ed.), Trust. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Gibson, M., & Simon, S. (2018). Losing your head: Are principals attached to their school? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *48* (1), 25-44.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory. Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.

Giles, D. (2019). *Relational Leadership in Education.* Routledge.

Ginsberg, R., & Davies, T. (2003). The emotional side of leadership. In N. Bennett, M. Crawford, & M. Cartwright (eds.), *Effective educational leadership*. Paul Chapman.

Glatter, R. (2021). Schools as organizations or institutions: defining core purposes. In P. Earley and T. Greany (eds.) *School Leadership and Education System Reform*. London: Bloomsbury.

Governors for Schools. (2021a). Diversity in school governance: Challenges and opportunities. Available from: https://governorsforschools.org.uk/find-a-school-governor/diversity-on-governing-boards/. [Accessed 5th May 2025.]

Governors for Schools (2021b) Support and challenge – how can governors balance the two to protect headteachers' wellbeing? London: www.governorsforschools.org.uk Available from: https://governorsforschools.org.uk/news/support-and-challenge-how-can-governors-balance-the-two-to-protect-headteachers-wellbeing/. [Accessed 8th December 2021.]

Grady, M. R. (2001). *The role of the chair of governors in school governance: A view from the chair*. Newcastle University eTheses.

Graen, G.B., Orris, J.B., & Johnson, T.W. (1973). Role assimilation process in a complex organisation. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 3,* 395-420.

Graen, G.B., Liden, R., & Hoel, W. (1982). Role of leadership in the employee withdrawal process. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 67,* 868-872.

Graen, G.B., Scandura, T.A., & Graen, M.R. (1986). A field experimental test of the moderating effects of growth need strength on productivity. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 71,* 484-491.

Graen, G.B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly, 6* (2)*,* 219-247.

Greany, T. (2015). More fragmented, and yet more networked: Analysing the responses of two Local Authorities in England to the Coalition's 'self-improving school-led system' reforms. *London Review of Education, 13* (2), 125–143.

Greany, T. & Higham, R. (2018). *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks: analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools.* UCL London: Institute of Education Press.

Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly, 13* (4), 423–451.

Gunter, H. (2011). *Leadership and the Reform of Education*. Policy Press.

Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's wrong with ethnography?*. London: Routledge.

Hannah, S. T., Woolfolk, R. L., & Lord, R. G. (2009). Leader self-structure: a framework for positive leadership. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 30(2)*, 269-290.

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J., & Rapson, R.L. (1994). *Emotional contagion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M. ([1927] 1962) *Being and time.* (Translated by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson.) Oxford: Blackwell.

Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. (2002). *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading*. Harvard Business Review Press.

HMSO. (1977). The Taylor Report. Available from:

http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/taylor/taylor1977.html [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

Hibberts, M. & Johnson, R. (2012) Mixed Methods Research. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (eds.), *Research Methods in Educational Leadership & Management*. London: Sage.

Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.

Hosking, D.M. (2006). Not leaders, not followers: A post-modern discourse of leadership processes, in B. Shamir, R. Pillai, B. Bligh & M. Uhl-Bien (eds.),

Follower-centered perspectives on leadership: A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Hosking, D.M., Dachler, H.P. & Gergen, K.J. (eds.) (1995). *Management and organization: Relational alternatives to individualism.* Brookfield: Avebury.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.

House, J.S. (1981). *Work, stress, and social support*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Husserl, E. ([1913] 1982). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy.* (Translated by F. Kerston.) Dordecht: Kluwer.

Jackson, E.M., & Johnson, R.E. (2012) When opposites do (and do not) attract: Interplay of leader and follower self-identities and its consequences for leader–member exchange. *The Leadership Quarterly 23* (3), 488-501

James, C., Brammer, S., Connolly, M., Fertig, M., James, J., & Jones, J. (2010). *The 'hidden givers': A study of school governing bodies in England*. CfBT Education Trust.

James, C., Goodall, J., Howarth, E., & Knights, E. (2012). *A review of the literature on the role of the board chair: What are the messages for chairs of school governing bodies?* CfBT Education Trust. Available from: https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/EducationDevelopmentTrust/files/a4/a48904a8-3403-4fda-be9e-0f4e3b315d83.pdf [Accessed 8th December 2021.]

Jehn, K., & Shah, P. P. (1997). Interpersonal relationships and task performance: An examination of mediating processes in friendship and acquaintance groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72* (4), 775–790.

Johnson, R. E., Selenta, C., & Lord, R. G. (2006). When organizational justice and the self-concept meet: Consequences for the organization and its members. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 99*, 175–201.

Jones, E. E. (1990). *Interpersonal perception*. W.H. Freeman and Company.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. Wiley.

Kahn, W.A., & Fellows, S. (2013). Employee engagement and meaningful work. In B.J. Dik, Z.S. Byrne, & M.F. Steger, *Purpose and meaning in the workplace.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kakabadse, A., Kakabadse, N., & Knight, R. (2010). The chemistry factor in the chairman/CEO relationship. *European management journal, 28*. 285-296.

Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24,* 285–308.

Kelchtermans, G. (2005). Teachers' emotions in educational reforms: Self-understanding, vulnerable commitment and micropolitical literacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21* (8), 995–1006.

Keup, L., Bruning N.S., & Seers A. (2004). *Members, leaders and the team: Extending LMX to co-worker relationships.* Paper presented at the Administrative Science Association of Canada annual meeting.

Kitto, S.C., Chesters, J., & Grbich, C. (2008). Quality in qualitative research. *Medical Journal of Australia, 188,* 243-246.

Klein, K.J., Dansereau, F., & Hall, R.J. (1994). Levels issues in theory development, data collection and analysis. *Academy of Management Review, 19 (2)*, 195-229.

Kogan, M. (1984). *School Governing Bodies*. London: Heinemann.

Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ladkin, D. & Probert, J. (2021). From sovereign to subject: Applying Foucault's conceptualization of power to leading and studying power within leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 32* (4), 1-12.

Lapointe, É., Vandenberghe, C., Ben Ayed, A. K., Schwarz, G., Tremblay, M., & Chênevert, D. (2019). Social comparisons, self-conceptions, and attributions: Assessing the self-related contingencies in leader-member exchange relationships. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 35* (3), 381–402.

Lauterbach, A. A. (2018). Hermeneutic Phenomenological Interviewing: Going Beyond Semi-Structured Formats to Help Participants Revisit Experience. *The Qualitative Report, 23 (11),* 2883-2898.

Lee, S. (2021). *What should be in the headteacher's report to governors?* London: www.askaclerk.co.uk. Available from: https://askaclerk.co.uk/what-should-be-in-the-headteachers-report-to-governors/. [Accessed 18th May 2025.]

Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2003). In-depth interviews. In J. Ritchie and J.Lewis *Qualitative research practice.* London: Sage.

Lewis, S. (2011). *Positive psychology at work.* Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lord, R. G., Brown, D. J., & Freiberg, S. J. (1999). Understanding the dynamics of leadership: The role of follower self-concepts in the leader/follower relationship. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 78*, 167–203.

Lord, R. G. & Brown, D. J. (2001). Leadership, values and subordinate self-concepts. *Leadership Quarterly, 12,* 133-152.

Lord, R. G., & Brown, D. G. (2004). *Leadership processes and follower self-identity.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.

Lu, J. G., Hafenbrack, A. C., Eastwick, P. W., Wang, D. J., Maddux, W. W., & Galinsky, A. D. (2017). 'Going out' of the box: Close intercultural friendships and romantic relationships spark creativity, workplace innovation, and entrepreneurship. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 102*, 1091–1108.

MacBeath, J. (2006). The talent enigma. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *9* (3), 183–204.

MacBeath, J. & Jardine, S. (1998). I didn't know he was ill – the role and value of the critical friend. *Improving Schools, 1* (1), 41-47.

MacPhail, A., Tannehill, D., & Ataman, R. (2024). The role of the critical friend in supporting and enhancing professional learning and development. *Professional Development in Education, 50* (4), 597–610.

Maisuria A., Rowland, L., Seely A, & Robert, N. (2024). *Independent schools: taxation and charitable status.* House of Commons Library.

Markus, H. & Wurf, E. (1987). The Dynamic Self-Concept: A Social Psychological Perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 38*, 299-337.

Mayer, R.C., Davis, J.H., and Schoorman, F.D. (1995). An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust. *The Academy of Management Review, 20, (3)*, 709-734.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, M., & Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook.* Arizona State University.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mukamel, R., Ekstrom, A.D., Kaplan. J., Iacoboni, M., & Freid, I. (2010). Single neuron responses in humans during execution and observation of actions, *Current Biology, 20,* 750-756.

Nahrgang, J.D., & Seo, J.J. (2015). How and why high Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) relationships develop: Examining the antecedents of LMX. In T. Bauer, & B. Erdogan, *The Oxford Handbook of Leader-Member Exchange*. Oxford University Press.

NCTL. (2014). *Leading governors: The role of the chair of governors in schools and academies*. London: National College for Teaching and Leadership. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323830/leading-governors-the-role-of-the-chair-of-governors-in-schools-and-academies.pdf [Accessed 8th December 2021.]

NEU. (2025). *Campaigning against academisation*. Available from: https://neu.org.uk/campaigns/campaigning-against-academisation. [Accessed 27th April 2025.]

NGA. (2018). *Being Strategic: A Guide for Governing Boards*. London: Wellcome/National Governance Association. Available from: https://www.nga.org.uk/media/jgxloimo/nga-being-strategic-schools-20230614.pdf. [Accessed 26th May 2025.]

NGA. (2020). *The Chair's Handbook (8th edition)*. London: NGA.

NGA. (2024). *Annual governance survey*. NGA Publications. Available from: https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/annual-governance-survey-2024/. [Accessed 26th May 2025.]

Ng, W. & De Cock, C. (2002). Battle in the boardroom: a discursive perspective. *Journal of Management Studies, 39*, 1, 23-49.

Ofsted. (2023). *School inspection handbook*. HM Government. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023. [Accessed 26th May 2025.]

Othman, R., Ee F.F., & Shi, N.L. (2010) Understanding dysfunctional leader-member exchange: antecedents and outcomes. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 31, (4)*, 337-350.

Otto, S. (2003). Not so very different: a comparison of the roles of chairs of governing bodies and managers in different sectors. In Cornforth, C. (ed.) *The governance of public and non-profit organisations: what do boards do?* London: Routledge.

Oyserman D. & Markus, H.R. (1998) Self as social representation. In: Flick, U. (ed.), *The psychology of the social*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 107–125.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Phillips, N. (2015). *Heads and governors conflict over who should influence schools policy*. London: www.schoolsweeks.co.uk. Available from: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/heads-and-governors-conflict-over-who-should-influence-schools-policy/. [Accessed 7th May 2022.]

Pillemer, J. & Rothbard, N.P. (2018). Friends without benefits: Understanding the dark sides of workplace friendship. *The Academy of Management Review, 43, (4)*, 635-660.

Pink, D.H. (2009). *Drive: The surprising trust about what motivates us.* New York: Riverhead Books.

Polit, D.F., & Beck, C.T. (2010). Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths and strategies. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 47,* 1451-1458.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Reis, H.T., & Gable, S.L. (2003). Towards a positive psychology of relationships, in C.L.M. Keyes & J. Haidt (eds.), Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well lived. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Richardson, J., & West, M. (2010). Dream teams: Towards a positive psychology of team working. In P.A. Linley, S.A. Harrington & N. Garcea (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology and Work*. Oxford University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (2005). *Oneself as another.* (Translated by K. Blamey.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Riessman, C.K. (2005). Narrative Analysis. In C.K. Riessman, *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life,* 1-7*.* University of Huddersfield.

Ritchie, J. (2003). The Applications of Qualitative Research Methods. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice.* London: Sage.

Rittel, H., & Webber, M. (1973). Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning. *Policy Sciences, 4, 2,* 155-169.

Roberts, J. (2002). Building the complementary board: The work of the plc chairman. *Long Range Planning 35*, 5, 493-520.

Robinson, V.M.J. (2007). 'The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Making sense of the evidence'. https://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2007/5. [Accessed 14th April 2025.]

Roffey, S. (2013). Inclusive and exclusive belonging: the impact on individual and community wellbeing. *Educational and Child Psychology, 30 (1),* 38-49.

Roffey, S. (2016). Positive relationships at work. In L.G. Oades, M.F, Steger, A. Delle Fave, & J. Passmore (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work.* John Wiley & Sons.

Rogers, L.E., & Escudero, V. (1996). Theoretical Foundations. In Rogers, L.E, & Escudero, V. (eds.), *An Interactional Perspective to the Study of Process and Form.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Rousseau, D. (1985). Issues of level in organizational research: Multilevel and cross-level perspectives, in L.L. Cummings & B.M. Straw (eds.), *Research in organizational behavior, 7,* 1-37. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

RSAcademics. (2025). Candidate Information Brochure, Head, Rossall School. Available from: https://www.rsacademics.com/current-vacancies/head-rossall-school/ [Accessed 13th February 2025.]

Ryan-Atkin, H. (2023). *The impact of multi-academy trust governance and accountability systems on the people involved in the organisation: Implications for professional autonomy and agency, local representation, and claims to legitimacy* (Doctoral thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University). Manchester Metropolitan University eSpace. Available from: https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/633067/1/HelenRyan-AtkinPhDthesis.pdf [Accessed 19th September 2025.]

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* London: Sage.

Sallis, J. (2001). *Effective School Governors: A Practical Guide.* London: Pearson Education.

Scandura, T., & Graen, G.B. (1984). Moderating effects of initial leader-member exchange status on the effects of a leadership intervention. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 69,* 428-436.

Schuck, S. (2011). Resisting complacency: my teaching through an outsider's eyes. In Schuck, S., & Pereira, P. (eds) *What Counts in Teaching Mathematics. Self Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices (Vol 11)*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Shuck, B., Reio, T., Jr., & Rocco, T. (2011). Employee engagement: An examination of antecedent and outcome variables. *Human Resource Development International, 14* (4), 427–445.

Seligman, M.E.P. (2011). *Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and wellbeing.* William Heinemann.

Seligman, M.E.P., Parks, A.C., & Steen, T. (2005). A balanced psychology and a full life. In F.A. Huppert, N. Baylis & Keverne, B., *The Science of Wellbeing.* Oxford University Press.

Shotter, J. (2008). *Conversational realities revisited: Life language, body and world.* Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications.

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Sills, C. (2006). Introduction: The Therapy Contract – A Mutual Commitment. In Sills, C. (ed) *Contracts in Counselling and Psychotherapy*. London: Sage.

Simkins, T. (2012). Understanding School Leadership and Management Development in England: Retrospect and Prospect. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *40* (5), 621-640.

Sitkin, S.B., Sutcliffe, K.M., & Barrios-Choplin, J.R. (1992). A dual- capacity model of communication media choice in organizations. *Human Communication Research*, 18, 563-598.

Sluss, D. M., & Ashforth, B. E. (2007). Relational identity and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review, 32,* 9–32.

Smith, J.A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 11,* 261-71.

Smith, J.A., & Osborn M. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J.A. Smith (ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods.* SAGE Publications.

Snape, D., & Spencer, L. (2003). The foundations of qualitative research. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers,* 1-23. Sage.

Sonnentag, S., & Pundt, A. (2015). Leader-Member Exchange from a job-stress perspective. In Bauer, T., & Erdogan, B., *The Oxford Handbook of Leader-Member Exchange*. Oxford University Press.

Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., & O'Connor, W. (2003). In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice.* London: Sage.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36* (1), 3–34.

Stewart, R. (1991). Chairmen and chief executives: An exploration of their relationships. *Journal of Management Studies, 28*, 511-527.

Stohl, C., & Redding, W. C. (1987). Messages and message exchange processes. In F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, & L. W. Porter (eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 451–502). Sage.

Synergia. (2025). Headteacher appraisals. Available from: https://www.synergiacoaching.co.uk/education-services/headteacher-appraisals/?utm_source=chatgpt.com. [Accessed 18th May 2025.]

The Key. (2024). Chair of governors: meetings with the headteacher. Available from: https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/the-governing-body/roles-on-the-governing-body/governing-body-chairs/chair-of-governors-regular-meetings-with-the-headteacher. [Accessed 18th May 2025.]

Thompson, P. (2000). *The voice of the past: Oral history.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, P., & Heffernan, A. (2021). Using theory in educational leadership, management and administration research. In S.J. Courtney, H.M. Gunter, R. Niesche, T. Trujillo (eds.), *Understanding educational leadership: critical perspectives and approaches*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Torraco, R. J. (2005). Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. *Human Resource Development Review, 4* (3), 356–367.

Tower Hamlets Council. (2021). Improving diversity in school governance: A strategic toolkit. Available from: https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Education-and-skills/School_governors/Guidance/SchoolGovToolkit.pdf [Accessed 5th May 2025.]

Trepanier, S.G., Fernet, C. & Austin, S. (2015). A longitudinal investigation of workplace bullying: Basic need satisfaction and employee functioning. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20 (1),* 105-116.

Trope, Y. (1986). Identification and inference processes in dispositional attribution. *Psychological Review*, 93, 239-257.

Tse, H.H.M, Troth, A.C., & Ashkanasy N.M. (2015). Leader-Member Exchange and emotion in organizations. In Bauer, T., & Erdogan, B., *The Oxford Handbook of Leader-Member Exchange*. Oxford University Press.

Uhl-Bien, M. (2006). Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17* (6), 654–676.

van Knippenberg, D., van Knippenberg, B., De Cremer, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2004). Leadership, self, and identity: A review and research agenda. *Leadership Quarterly, 15*, 825–856.

van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* The University of Western Ontario.

Weick, K.E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Sage.

Weiss, H.M., & Cropanzo, R. (1996). Affective events theory: A theoretical discussion of the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work. In L.L. Cummings & B.M. Straw (eds.), *Research in organizational behavior, 18,* 1-74. Westport, CT: JAI Press.

Wenner, M. (2009). Smile, it could make you happier! *Scientific American,* August 2009. http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/smile-it-could-make-you-happier. [Accessed 31st January 2024.]

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health, 15,* 215-228.

Yardley, L. (2015). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. In J.A. Smith (ed.), *Qualitative psychology*. London: Sage.

Yukl, G.A. (1999). An evaluative essay on current conceptions of effective leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 8*, 33-48.

Yukl, G.A., O'Donnell, M., & Taber, T. (2009). *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 24, (4)*, 289-299.

Zhou, L., & Wang M. (2015). Leader-Member Exchange and newcomer adjustment. In T. Bauer, & B. Erdogan, *The Oxford handbook of Leader-Member Exchange*. Oxford University Press.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Description
A	Final ethics approval from UoNSoE.
B	Text of a speculative email sent to headteachers, requesting their participation in the research.
C	Information sheet for potential research participants.
D	Consent form.
E	Interview schedule for headteachers.
F	Interview schedule for CoGs.
G	Data overview of Relationship E.
H	Coding schedule.

APPENDIX A: Final ethics approval from UoNSoE.

University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

School of Education
University of Nottingham
The Dearing Building
Jubilee Campus
Wollaton Road
Nottingham
NG8 1BB

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

10/11/2022

Our Ref: RoweP_62

Dear Philip

Thank you for your research ethics application for your project:

An examination of the relationship between headteachers and Chairs of Governors in standalone secondary schools in England

Thank you for sending in your revised documents following our request for some minor changes to be made in a letter dated 18 October 2022.

Your careful attention to the feedback, and the amendments made are clear and rationale. We wish you well on this interesting, and innovative research project.

If your research overruns the intended completion date, please contact the Ethics Team to arrange an extension and update on any additions/changes to your work.

Please note that from September 2021 applications given a favourable ethical opinion will be subject to an annual audit in line with the *Code of Practice for Research Ethics Committees* (2021).

Dr Gary Winship
On behalf of the Ethics Committee

+44 (0)115 9514470
educationadmin@nottingham.ac.uk
nottingham.ac.uk/education

APPENDIX B: Text of a speculative email sent to headteachers, requesting their participation in the research.

Dear [Headteacher's name],

Following a 30-year career in teaching, latterly as a secondary school headteacher, I am currently studying for a PhD at the University of Nottingham, researching the headteacher-Chair of Governor relationship. A brief information sheet about the nature and purpose of the research is attached. Given your experience, I would very much value your contribution to this study and would be grateful if you and your Chair of Governors could be one of the eight case studies I am undertaking as part of my research. This would involve me interviewing each of you for approximately 75 minutes, preferably in person but online if you prefer.

The interview would be structured into four topic areas: the more detailed questions for you to answer would be sent to you in advance. The topic areas are:

1	To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-Chair of Governors relationship?
2	How far is the future relationship between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors established through the appointment and induction process?
3	Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the Chair developed?
4	How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and Chairs in the context of Chairs supporting and challenging the headteacher?
5	How do headteachers and Chairs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?

The findings of the study will form part of my PhD thesis. All information provided during the interviews will be held anonymously so that it will not be possible to trace information or comments back to individual contributors. This includes between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors in the same school. The names of all participants and schools will be anonymised both within the research process and subsequently within the thesis, with letters being given instead, such as School A. The type and location of school will also be disguised so that it cannot be recognised from the research, such as in 'School A is a co-educational state-funded school in the South-East of England'.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Participants may also ask questions at any time and discuss any concerns with either myself (accessed at Philip.Rowe@nottingham.ac.uk) or my PhD supervisors Professor Toby Greany (Toby.Greany@nottingham.ac.uk) and Asst Professor Kevin Richardson (Kevin.Richardson@nottingham.ac.uk). If at any time you have any concerns about the ethical basis of the research, the University of Nottingham's ethics committee can also be contacted by email at the TT-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk.

During the research, all precautions will be taken by me to maintain your confidentiality and only I will have access to your personal data. Your personal data will be kept until shortly after graduation after the end of the study so that I am able to contact you about

the findings of the study and possible follow-up studies (unless you advise me that you do not wish to be contacted). After this time, your data will be stored anonymously and securely in the University of Nottingham's Research Data Repository for a maximum of ten years, at which point it will be destroyed.

A consent form will be signed before the study starts and you have the right to request that your details and data be deleted at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or have any questions, I would be grateful if you could contact me at Philip.Rowe@nottingham.ac.uk. If you could speak to your Chair of Governors in the first instance, I can then contact them separately to explain the purpose of the research and their involvement.

With thanks,

Philip Rowe

APPENDIX C: Information sheet for potential research participants.

Research Title	An examination of the relationship between headteachers and Chairs of Governors in secondary schools in England.
Researcher	Philip Rowe (Philip.Rowe@nottingham.ac.uk)
Programme	Education Research PhD, University of Nottingham
Supervisors	Professor Toby Greany (Toby.Greany@nottingham.ac.uk) and Asst Professor Kevin Richardson (Kevin.Richardson@nottingham.ac.uk)

Having taught for the past 30 years in a range of schools across the UK, latterly as a headteacher, I am now researching for a PhD at the University of Nottingham.

Few relationships in school leadership are as important as that between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors. Although each will be different, the relationship lies at the heart of all major school strategy and determines how successfully it is delivered. It is also of immense personal value to the headteacher and the Chair as they carry out their respective duties.

However, the significance of the relationship is not consistently reflected in literature about school leadership and governance nor in the induction and training of most headteachers and Chairs. It is unusual for the topic to be discussed at conferences or for it to be highlighted in school inspections or individual appraisals.

The purpose of this research is therefore:

- To examine how such relationships are forged, how they develop and how and why they function in the way they do. Due its common usage, particular focus will be given to the phrase 'critical friend' and the inherent tensions that exist within it.
- To identify the conditions which shape these relationships and the indicators of more and less successful ways of working.

The research will be conducted through eight case studies of headteacher-Chair relationships. The focus of the research is on headteachers and Chairs of Governors in English secondary schools in both the state-funded and independent sectors. The reason for focusing on secondary schools is that, principally due to the size of the school and the governing body, the role of Chair is different to that in primary schools. Although governance in the independent sector differs in some respects from that in state-funded schools, there is enough alignment for valid comparisons to be made and enough difference to appreciate what variances exist and why.

I will be interviewing headteachers and Chairs separately, each for approximately 90 minutes, preferably in person but online if preferred.

The interview will be structured into five topic areas: the more detailed questions for participants to answer will be sent to them in advance. The topic areas are:

1	To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-Chair of Governors relationship?
2	How far is the future relationship between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors established through the appointment and induction process?

3	Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the Chair developed?
4	How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and Chairs in the context of Chairs supporting and challenging the headteacher?
5	How do headteachers and Chairs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?

The findings of the study will form part of my PhD thesis. All information provided during the interviews will be held anonymously so that it will not be possible to trace information or comments back to individual contributors. This includes between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors in the same school. The names of all participants and schools will be anonymised both within the research process and subsequently within the thesis, with letters being given instead, such as School A. The type and location of school will also be disguised so that it cannot be recognised from the research, such as in 'School A is a co-educational state-funded school in the South-East of England'.

The ambition for the research is that it could be utilised by both headteachers and CoGs, and their respective associations, to provide guidance and training to assist in the formation and development of these relationships for the good of their schools and for their own professional and personal wellbeing.

During the research, all precautions will be taken by me to maintain your confidentiality and only I will have access to your personal data. Your personal data will be kept until shortly after graduation after the end of the study so that I am able to contact you about the findings of the study and possible follow-up studies (unless you advise me that you do not wish to be contacted). After this time, your data will be stored anonymously and securely in the University of Nottingham's Research Data Repository for a maximum of ten years, at which point it will be destroyed.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Participants may also ask questions at any time and discuss any concerns with either myself (accessed at Philip.Rowe@nottingham.ac.uk) or my PhD supervisors Professor Toby Greany (Toby.Greany@nottingham.ac.uk) and Asst Professor Kevin Richardson (Kevin.Richardson@nottingham.ac.uk). If at any time you have any concerns about the ethical basis of the research, the University of Nottingham's ethics committee can also be contacted by email at the TT-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk.

This research is not sponsored or financially supported by the University of Nottingham. It is personally funded.

If you have any further questions about this research, please do get in touch.

Philip Rowe
Philip.Rowe@nottingham.ac.uk

APPENDIX D: Consent form.

Research Title	An examination of the relationship between headteachers and Chairs of Governors in secondary schools in England.
Researcher	Philip Rowe (Philip.Rowe@nottingham.ac.uk)
Programme	Education Research PhD, University of Nottingham
Supervisors	Professor Toby Greany (Toby.Greany@nottingham.ac.uk) and Asst Professor Kevin Richardson (Kevin.Richardson@nottingham.ac.uk)

Please indicate your consent to each statement.

- I have read the Information Sheet and understand the context for the research. Yes/No
- The nature and purpose of the research has been explained to me and I understand my involvement and contribution to it. Yes/No
- I understand and agree to take part, knowing that I can withdraw at any time and this will not affect my status now or in the future. Yes/No
- I understand that the information gained from this study may be published, although any information I provide will remain anonymous. Yes/No
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and that this data will be stored electronically in the form of an audio recording (or a video recording if the interview is conducted remotely). I understand that this may also be transcribed for analysis purposes. Yes/No
- I understand that only the researcher will have access to this data, which will be stored in a secure place, with all data files password-protected and encrypted. Yes/No
- I understand that, on completion of the course, all data collected will be held anonymously and securely in the University of Nottingham's Research Data Repository for a maximum of ten years. Yes/No
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information. Yes/No
- I understand I may contact the Research Ethics Co-ordinator in the School of Education at TT-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk if I wish to raise any concerns about my involvement in this research. Yes/No
- I have read and understood the Research Participant Privacy Notice which is attached to this form. Yes/No

Signed: _____

(Research Participant)

Print Name: _____ Date: _____

Research Participant Privacy Notice

Privacy information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are in order to provide research data for a PhD thesis.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under UK GDPR

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

How long we keep your data

Your data will be stored anonymously and securely in the University of Nottingham's Research Data Repository for a maximum of ten years, at which point it will be destroyed.

APPENDIX E: Interview schedule for headteachers.

Question 1:	**To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-Chair of Governors (CoG) relationship?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. What experience did each postholder have of headteacher-CoG relationships (or similar) prior to appointment?* *b. What were the principal influences that affected their approach and attitude?*
Questions to ask:	a. Prior to starting as headteacher, what experience did you have of the headteacher-CoG relationship? b. If your experience was limited, what impression did you have of the relationship and the way that it worked? What do you consider were the key influences in forming that impression?

Question 2:	**To what extent is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment process (or at its earliest stages)?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. How much consideration is given within the appointment process to the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG (and the wider board)?* *b. What opportunities are included within the process for this to be explored and are these formal or informal?* *[The questions in this category may need to be adapted should the current CoG not have been involved in the headteacher's appointment.]*
Questions to ask:	a. How important was the relationship with the CoG (and/or the governing body in general) to you during the selection process? b. How far did your consideration of this relationship move beyond the selection process? c. Did you feel that you had the opportunity to get to know them? If so, was this on a personal or a professional basis? d. Have there been any issues resulting from the appointment process that have in some ways lingered once you have been in post?

Question 3:	**Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. What is the pattern of communication between the headteacher and the CoG? How has this been established and has this changed over time?* *b. Is the relationship purely professional or is there a personal dimension as well? If so, what is the nature of this personal relationship and why is that seen as important?*
Questions to ask:	a. What is the nature of your relationship with the CoG? How often do you meet? When you do, how long are the meetings and is there a formal agenda? How are issues or action points followed up afterwards?

	b. How has the relationship developed over time? Was change instigated by one party or was it devised mutually? What were the reasons for the relationship changing? c. How would you describe 'trust' and how important is it within the relationship? How was this 'earned'? Was it there at the beginning of the relationship or do you think it developed as time went on? d. How is your relationship with the CoG different from that you have with rest of the governing body? Do you feel that there are issues you can raise with the CoG that you are unable to (or would prefer not to) raise with other governors? How confidential is the communication between the two? e. Is your relationship purely professional or do you view it as important that there is a personal dimension as well? If so, how was this initiated and how does it manifest itself? For example, do you ever meet on purely social terms?

Question 4:	**How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. What does the term 'critical friend' mean to headteachers and CoGs? Is the phrase helpful and does it reflect the essence of this relationship?* *b. How is the balance between 'support and challenge' successfully established between headteachers and CoGs?*
Questions to ask:	a. In what ways does the CoG offer you support as headteacher? Do you feel this support is different from that provided by the rest of the governing body? How and why do you value this support? b. Is this support regarding specific policies or initiatives or is it more personal regarding your day-to-day performance as a headteacher? Please give an example of a time you found the CoG to be particularly supportive. c. Would you regard the CoG as a 'friend'? If so, how did this friendship come about and how would you categorise it? d. How often does the CoG challenge you as headteacher? How do you react to this challenge? Please give an example of a time when you found challenge from the CoG to be particularly helpful or unhelpful.

Question 5:	**How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. Are the boundaries of operational and strategic responsibility clearly defined? If they are, how was this arrived at and who was primarily responsible for determining these?* *b. Have there been times when this boundary has been crossed or blurred? What effect did this have on the relationship and how were any problems resolved?*
Questions to ask:	a. Are you confident that the lines between operational and strategic responsibility are clearly understood? Have there been occasions when this has not been the case? Why do you think that was and what effect did this have on the relationship with the CoG?

	b. Do you feel it is your responsibility to ensure that the focus of the governing body remains primarily on strategic rather than operational issues? c. In what circumstances is there an overlap between operational and strategic responsibility? Who determines when there is? d. What methods do you employ to ensure that governors support your decisions? What role do you expect the CoG to play if there should be a dispute with a governor (or governors)? Can you give an example of such a dispute?

APPENDIX F: Interview schedule for CoGs.

Question 1:	**To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-Chair of Governors (CoG) relationship?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. What experience did each postholder have of headteacher-CoG relationships prior to appointment?* *b. What were the principal influences that affected their approach and attitude?*
Questions to ask:	a. What was your experience/understanding of CEO-Chair relationships prior to starting as CoG? b. If your experience was limited, what impression did you have of the relationship and the way that it worked? What do you consider were the key influences in forming that impression? c. How did you plan initially for the relationship to work successfully? What fundamental principles did you have in mind?

Question 2:	**To what extent is the future relationship between the headteacher and the Chair of Governors (CoG) established through the appointment process?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. How much consideration is given within the appointment process to the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG (and the wider board)?* *b. What opportunities are included within the process for this to be explored and are these formal or informal?* *[The questions in this category may need to be adapted should the CoG not have been involved in the headteacher's appointment.]*
Questions to ask:	a. What were the principal considerations you had in mind when appointing the headteacher? Were there specific constituencies you felt you had to satisfy (either from within or outside the governing body)? b. How much contact did you have personally with each of the candidates within the appointment process? c. What was the nature of this contact? Was this more an opportunity for you to get to know the candidate or for the candidate to find about the school? How did you set about achieving this? d. Did you discuss with the candidates how the governing body operated and your expectations as to your relationship with the future headteacher? e. Thinking back on the appointment process, do you think there could/should have been more scope for getting to know the new headteacher given your experience since?

Question 3:	**Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. What is the pattern of communication between the headteacher and the CoG? How has this been established and has this changed over time?*

	b. Is the relationship purely professional or is there a personal dimension as well? If so, what is the nature of this personal relationship and why is that seen as important?
Questions to ask:	a. [For CoGs who appointed the headteacher] Following appointment, did the relationship develop as anticipated or did you need to adapt as you got to know the new headteacher better? b. What model have you adopted as CoG in the way that you relate to the headteacher? How would you summarise your principal role in the way that you deal with them? c. How would you describe 'trust' and how important is it within the relationship? How was this 'earned'? Was it there at the beginning of the relationship or do you think it developed as time went on? d. Do you attempt to limit your relationship to a discussion of the 'practicalities' of school life or do your view it as important that you act in a 'supervision' role i.e. as a sounding board for how the headteacher is feeling, possibly on a confidential basis? e. If it exists, how do you feel about this counselling role in the light of your relationship to the governing body? Do you believe there are times when your role as CoG means that you may have to keep some information pertaining to the headteacher secret from other governors?

Question 4:	**How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. What does the term 'critical friend' mean to headteachers and CoGs? Is the phrase helpful and does it reflect the essence of this relationship?* *b. How is the balance between 'support and challenge' successfully established between headteachers and CoGs?*
Questions to ask:	a. In what ways do you feel you support the headteacher? How do you consider your role as CoG to be different to that of other governors? b. Have you discussed the ways in which you seek to support the headteacher with them? If not, how do you know that you are being supportive? c. How do you balance your role as CoG between supporting the headteacher and chairing/representing the governing body? Has there been an occasion when there has been a tension between the two? If so, how do you resolve it? d. When and why do you consider it important to challenge the headteacher or to be 'critical'? On such occasions, do you feel the headteacher is open to such criticism and how do you respond if you feel that the headteacher is resistant? Can you give an example of such a situation?

Question 5:	**How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?**
Sub-Questions:	*a. Are the boundaries of operational and strategic responsibility clearly defined? If they are, how was this arrived at and who was primarily responsible for determining these?*

	b. Have there been times when this boundary has been crossed or blurred? What effect did this have on the relationship and how were any problems resolved?
Questions to ask:	a. Do you feel you understand the difference between operational and strategic responsibilities? How was this understanding arrived at and do all governors share your view as to how these are delineated? b. Are there times when you feel that the headteacher does not involve you adequately in matters at school? Are these operational or strategic? c. Do you feel it can be the case that CoGs need to be made more aware – or become more involved – in determining operational issues and outcomes? d. How far has your approach to formulation of school strategy aligned with that of the headteacher? On what basis do you feel that governors have the right to countermand the headteacher? How was such a dispute managed and what was the outcome?

APPENDIX G: Data overview of Relationship E.

Following transcription, and approval given by the participants, the data within each set of interviews was combined to provide an overview of each relationship. Below is an example of one of them. The terms HE and CE refer to the respective page numbers of the interview for either Headteacher E or CoG E.

Question 1:	**To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-CoG relationship?**

Prior to headship, Headteacher E worked as a deputy at a school in special measures. The headteacher therefore had to work with the governors, and the local community, in order to try to get the school out of special measures: 'So I did see that level of support, where the Chair of Governors was a really important part of that process and that development and growth of the school. And I saw how critical it was for them to really understand the school: that you couldn't be somebody that just rocked up, shook hands and went away. The school really did depend on them.' (HE:2) As part of that process, as part of the senior leadership team, she worked closely with 'link' governors. However, she admits that she didn't have a great deal of insight directly into the headteacher-CoG relationship.

She also had an alternative perspective through her mother, who had been a CoG of a primary school when she was growing up. Although she appreciated that that was more of an operational role than in a secondary school – 'you're kind of a friend to the school, you're really supportive' (HE:2) – she had 'also seen what my mum had done in terms of being part of quite difficult meetings and HR stuff and complaints' (HE:2).

As a first headship was in a new free school, she helped in forming the governing body, alongside a more experienced governor, and together they launched the process of electing a CoG and supporting them. She formed a close relationship with the new CoG and they are still in contact: 'By trade, he's been a pharmacist, a barrister and a police sergeant, so he had a really good level of intelligence and experience of big institutions. He knew how all that worked. And he was really good: very supportive of the school but understanding of the critical needs of development and how to hold people to account.' (HE:3)

Headteacher E found herself having to train the governors to be governors, which was something which preoccupied her both before and during the first months of the headship. She acknowledges that this left her fairly unsupported in her own role, although she believes she didn't need a lot of 'hand-holding' (HE:3).

Once the school had opened, the relationship developed, as the governing body learnt how to hold her account. Headteacher E very much wanted the governing body to be critical, if necessary, because, by being so, they would actually support her: 'I felt very strongly that I shouldn't just be creating a group of friends who were just nice to me. I had some incredibly difficult times – and still do – and so needed to know that somebody was there to support me and have my back. But that doesn't mean they just support you whatever's going on. I needed somebody that was prepared to say 'hang on a minute: maybe you should have done this or have you about that?'. So I was trying to train them to be able to do that.' (HE: 4)

Regarding the CoG specifically, Headteacher E believes they 'developed together' (HE:4): 'We met probably every fortnight. And I would ring him if I needed to talk

about stuff. I think you've got to have dedicated time together definitely. And, when I've had times when I haven't had that, it's so apparent how important that time is.' (HE:4)

CoG E had some prior experience of governance, given that he was an associate headteacher for some time, and knew most about the headteacher-CoG relationship from his time as an acting headteacher. As this was specifically an interim position, he found his relationship with the CoG 'professional': CoG E wanted it to be purely on an operational footing and so had no appetite to become more closely involved. In any case, he had seen previous headteacher-CoG relationships become too close and 'familiar' (CE:1) and 'it had worked out very well' (CE:1): 'I felt that the Chairs was simply, unbeknown to him, even though he was a bright chap, manipulated by what the headteacher was telling him. And I think their personal – personal relationship is too strong a word – their relationship as friends had masked the professional relationship.' (CE:2)

Question 2:	**To what extent is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment process (or at its earliest stages)?**

Although the CoG had not played a part in other processes should had been part of, the CoG at School E was part of the process, even though the decision-making was the responsibility to the trust. This was not significant in her thinking, however, but she did release that 'the governors and the school have no relationship whatsoever' (HE:5). This led her to the conclusions that, as with the free school, she would have to build up governance, and the governing body, effectively from scratch. To that end, she realised that the CoG, although capable, did not have the time to devote to such a new school: 'I worked really hard at building a relationship with her, and did have a good relationship with her … but I knew that the school was not going to progress as quickly as it needed to because she couldn't dedicate the time that's needed for that role … Growing and developing a new school is a very different beast to an existing school.' (HE:5) Headteacher E therefore went to the trust and requested that they attend to the lack of leadership – or lack of capacity for leadership – on the governing body.

Headteacher E recognises two issues here: first, her confidence in challenging the *status quo* derived largely from the experience she had had at her first school; second, she benefited from the trust structure, in that she could go over the heads of the governing body to appeal to the trust: 'Had I not had that, I'm not sure what I would have done. It would have meant me speaking to her [the CoG] directly. It is really difficult, isn't it?' (HE:6)

Headteacher E appreciates the value of the headteacher-CoG relationship and knows the cost when it goes wrong: 'My job is a very lonely job. I think there have been too many incidents where I could just see that things had gone wrong because it wasn't a good relationship. When I say it wasn't a good relationship, it wasn't productive and fruitful and I knew it was impacting the school.' (HE:6)

When it came to the appointment of CoG E, the trust approached him and then he came to Headteacher E for a 'chat': 'I think I probably talked about how I would be happy to work with somebody … he was checking me out basically … 'can I work with her?' and then he said 'yes'.' (HE:6) Headteacher E says that, on meeting CoG E, she

realised that she 'could get on with him. By that, I mean I could have a professional relationship, that I would feel comfortable to talk to him freely, to be honest.' (HE:7) Her only concern was that he was an ex-headteacher and whether that would lead to him telling her 'how to run the school' (HE:7).

CoG E wanted to become CoG at School E because, even though he had only been a governor a short time, he felt that the governing body was inadequate and that he could do a better job if leading it: 'And so, when I was asked if I would be Chair, even though I wasn't looking for a job of work, I thought I could actually have a really positive impact.' (CE:2) However, due to COVID restrictions, these early discussions, and the appointment itself, were all conducted online and so Headteacher E's involvement in the process was limited. He did not know her well, although 'the person who had introduced me to the school in the first place, and had got me on board, I'd known professionally and as a friend for many, many years, rated [Headteacher E] highly so I took that as a good, you know, a wholesome justification' (CE:2)

Question 3:	**Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?**

Following his appointment, Headteacher E and CoG E decided to 'have a calendared meeting every two weeks' (HE:7), although 'we've kind of done different things as time has gone on' (HE:7). As COVID restrictions were still in place, meetings were initially virtual, which were 'awkward' because 'you can't build a relationship in the same way' (HE:7). However, Headteacher E appreciated CoG E's insights into education and the local area. Most reassuring, thought, was the fact that he did not attempt to tell her what to do: 'He's so professional about things like that.' (HE:7)

For Headteacher E, one particular episode impacted significantly on the relationship. This was when she was ill at home with COVID at a time when she was facing 'a difficult situation' (HE:7) with one of her senior leaders, which involved 'some kind of trust politics' (HE:7), which she found 'really difficult' (HE:7). She, therefore, in desperation, sought the assistance of CoG E: 'I was in bed and I didn't get out of bed for seven days. I basically phoned him and I couldn't actually speak without crying and I am not like that at all. So it was me being very, very vulnerable in front of him and he was so kind. He's a very kind man and he was just like – because it made me laugh like deep within me; I wasn't feeling like laughing at the time – I remember him saying, 'right [Headteacher E], I think maybe we'll tackle this when you are feeling a little bit better'.' (HE:7) This was quite early on in the relationship and Headteacher E was not totally sure how CoG E would react. However, she feels his kindness, professionalism and 'normality' (HE:8) in that moment brought them closer together from then on (although they have not spoken about it since). She says two things stand out: that she as a person mattered more than the situation, which could wait until she was better; and that being there to support, advise and sympathise was part of his role ('This is part of what I am meant to do. I'm meant to be here for you.' (HE:8)). These were 'powerful' (HE:9) words for her to here and 'very much appreciated' (HE:9).

She feels the fact that he is an educationalist is very important for both her and School E at this particular point in time, partly because the school is new and partly due to the pandemic. However, she does not feel it is essential for the CoG to be an educationalist – his 'personality' (HE:9) is the most important factor.

When asked about the personal, and well as the professional, aspect to the relationship, Headteacher E says that this is not essential, although having CoG E's 'level of emotional intelligence is incredibly helpful' (HE:9). She feels it is possible to work with a CoG without a bond but admits she probably would not have been as confident to speak candidly on the phone if that openness and honesty was not there.

Although guardedly, Headteacher E admits that their relationship has become more informal over time: 'I send him silly messages about 'The Archers'. The reason for this: 'It's a tough old job and I want to have fun at work and enjoy it. And I want him to enjoy it.' (HE:9/10) 'I think it's important to have those conversations with people, to find out what they're like and what they're about. And, you know, a little bit about your personal life. We go to [local] events and stuff like that. And I like to know what he likes, what he enjoys. And he's a very kind, thoughtful person.' (HE:10)

Headteacher E says that, for the first time in her headship, she is now able to work with the CoG in deciding how they manage the governing body. Although the trust sends them a 'set template agenda' (HE:10) to use, they discuss the priorities they want to establish for meetings: 'pre-meeting, we sit down, have a look at the agenda, change a few bits and pieces and have a chat about it.' (HE:10)

Outside of meetings, Headteacher E is happy to ring him CoG E, to act as 'a sounding board' (HE:11) and 'to ask me some critical questions' (HE:11). She does this more than she has done with other heads. This is because, in the previous trust, there were more people she could contact – 'I would ring somebody from HR it was a HR issue' (HE:11).

CoG E admits that he did not have a clear idea as to how his relationship with Headteacher E would work and that he did not know Headteacher E very well. He was also 'still getting [his] head around how the trust operated': although he had had experience of other trusts operated, he found it 'intriguing from an academic point of view' to discover how this particular trust operated.

Having been appointed, CoG E 'thought the most important thing I now need to do – and I didn't say this to [Headteacher E] – was to build trust and that needed time. And I needed just to sit there, sit on my hands, and do a lot of listening. Be the last person to speak. So I just spent, probably the first two or three months, just coming in quite a bit and listening and responding and basically doing anything that [Headteacher E] wanted of me in terms of the role of a governor in the school at that time.' (CE:2) He found himself becoming involved in a lot of appointments – which were a lot as School D being a new and expanding school – and this meant that Headteacher E has been able to see 'what makes me tick and that has been thing I hope that's resulted in a build of trust' (CE:2).

This observation of Headteacher E ensured that CoG E developed a clear understanding of her leadership style and approach. There was a sense that her approach was similar to his own, although 'she hasn't fallen foul of some of the faults that I feel foul of and I admire that in her' (CE:3). Likewise, he felt it important to get to know the school, especially as it was a new school ('to unpick the expectations of parents, the community and, to a degree, the trust' (CE:3)).

In terms of meetings, CoG E said to Headteacher E that they should meet once a fortnight. That did not work very well and so they then met when CoG E was in school. That did not well either so they reverted to a formal, fortnightly meeting, which lasts between sixty and ninety minutes: 'Having calendared meetings is much better.' (CE:4) 'I feel much more clear that that's my chance to sit down and talk to [Headteacher E] and she's got a space in her diary because … all the way through I'm constantly thinking 'she's incredibly busy, I mustn't steal her time' because I know, being in that role myself, you're clock watching all the time to the next thing. So I must make the most efficient and effective use of time. I thought I could do that by fitting in around other things. Actually, I realised that wasn't the most efficient and effective way and to actually say right every other week we will sit down for an hour to an hour and a half and talk business is.' (CE:4)

Although they do not work to an agenda, CoG E builds up a list of questions beforehand that he needs to ask Headteacher E. He begins the meeting by asking them and then Headteacher follows up with issues in the school ('on the boundary between operational and strategic' (CE:4). This then 'merges' (CE:4) into a more general conversation. There are not formal minutes but CoG E did experiment with reporting back to the governing body on the content of the meetings. However, this turned out not to be a good idea (as some matters were entirely 'speculative' (CE:5) and potentially stifling) and so this was quietly dropped. The reports, intended to demonstrate openness, also had the opposite effect for some governors, suggesting that the two of them were somehow 'cooking the books behind the scenes and having too close a relationship' (CE:5).

CoG E tries to avoid acting like the former headteacher, although he does end up thinking about his own experiences when Headteacher E is talking. If necessary, he will give 'advice, if [Headteacher E] feels it could be helpful' (CE:4). However, he recognises his own deficiencies, that his thinking could be outdated for example. He is conscious, though, that, if he's not advising her, who is?

When asked how he feels the relationship has changed over time, CoG E says that he feels that Headteacher trusts him and that this has been achieved 'mainly through being absolutely, exhaustively thorough and proper about the way I've gone about things with the governing body in terms of getting things right' (CE:6). As well as being on top of governance, CoG E also feels he's been available for Headteacher E to consult: 'I've always been there at the end of the phone, if there's been an issue, you know, maybe on Friday evening: 'oh, gosh, [Headteacher E]'s rung, this must be serious'. So I'll get back to her and I'll respond. So there hasn't been any delays if needed.' (CE:6) When asked whether he feels that 'he's got her back' is an adequate description, he responds positively.

CoG E is also conscious that Headteacher E has an equivalent relationship with the trust. CoG E feels it is important that he supports in this relationship, 'not that [Headteacher E] is not big enough or brave enough to do that herself but I don't think a headteacher should be put in that position, where, on numerous occasions, they're having to question decisions made by the trust … if it's a trust issue, then we'll send a joint email to the trust because I don't think she should always be putting her neck out.' (CE:6).

The above shows the level of support that CoG E feels he owes Headteacher E. However, at times, he feels he needs to, in some ways, rationalise or explain away

attempts by him to support Headteacher E emotionally or to demonstrate support for her, out of a concern that this was not be viewed as 'professional' by others.

Likewise, he is reluctant to confirm that he and Headteacher E somehow manage governors' meetings, again out of a concern as to how that might appear: 'We are very much an autonomous body and I never get any sense that [Headteacher E] is trying to, in the nicest possible way, manipulate outcomes.' (CE:9)

He is similarly cautious when discussing whether he and Headteacher E have a 'personal' as well as a 'professional' relationship. He concurs that there are informal discussions about 'The Archers' and gardening but that he 'would worry' (CE:11) if there was a 'blurring of those lines' (CE:11) if such informal closeness was misconstrued.

Question 4:	**How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs?**

Headteacher E is happy with the phrase 'critical friend' because she feels 'equally supported and held to account' (HE:11). Regarding 'critical', she does not equate that to 'real criticism, not as in personal criticism. It's a critique of the situation, so I feel [CoG E] can give me a critique of the situation and ask critical questions that help shape things.' (HE:12) She does not feel sensitive about being criticised because 'I make mistakes. I tell [CoG E] when I make mistakes because we all make mistakes.' (HE:12) Furthermore, 'it's never done in a horrible way' (HE:12).

As for 'friend', she sees CoG E more as 'a support' (HE:12). She gives being able to ring him and talk through problems honestly as an example. When it is pointed out that this shows the personal investment into the relationship, something she initially put to one side, she acknowledges that their relationship is 'close' (HE:12). Likewise, she is clear that there is considerable trust in each other, even those the relationship is only in its second year. 'I think it's grown. You don't instantly have that whole kind of 'I trust you implicitly with my life' because you don't know somebody. But I think, you know, the moments that we've had, where we've had difficult situations that we've worked through together, like that phone call, like when I've had a difficulty with the governor and we've talked it through together … it just adds to that understanding of how people work and how they respond to other people, how you see them behave towards others, and all of that adds to that trust.' (HE:13)

CoG E's initial response to the phrase was 'I looked at that and I thought 'can I come up with something smart?' and I really can't' (CE:9). Whilst the governing body 'must view its role as being a 'critical friend'' (CE:9), he believes the CoG's role as different: 'I hesitate doing … those elements of challenge [and] criticism … I think this role is a little bit more in line with the role of the sovereign, in that I wouldn't want to appear as openly critical or challenging of the headteacher to the rest of the governing body and to the outside world. I think that's something that's got to happen behind the scenes.' (CE:9) Regarding 'friend', 'I always thought one needed to be absolutely clear about dividing lines between friendship and professional relationships. Because, if you look at my responsibilities, as Chair of Governors, we are the disciplinary body for [Headteacher E]. Well, what does that look like, if we regularly dine with each other?' (CE:11)

Question 5:	How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?

Headteacher E thinks CoG E is 'amazing' (HE:13) at understanding the difference between operational and strategic issues. She is particularly impressed as to how he can remain quiet and not give his opinion on operational matters when he has been in senior leadership roles himself. This, she finds an ideal situation: 'He completely gets the operational side of things. So that's been really nice because I just don't have to explain any of that to him.' (HE:13)

Headteacher E does say sometimes it is useful for governors to become involved in operational issues – one previous CoG, for example, came into school to give INSET on coaching – and headteachers have to accept that the primary motivation for some governors, parents governors in particular, will be an educational issues from within school: 'I think part of my role is being very respectful of that.' (HE:13) Furthermore, it 'might be because they've got a particular skill set that would enhance something in the school. So I've got to be grateful for that but, when you're in a governors meeting, you've got to focus on governance.' (HE:13)

CoG E does not think there have many issues where the divide between operational and strategic issues has not been understood or observed. One issue that did arise was regarding the curriculum policy, which one governor believed was not being implemented. This led to a detailed discussion on the board, about the issue itself and whether this is a matter for the board to discuss in the first place. What arose was an acceptance that, in the short term, the implementation of schemes of work, was an operational matter for the school but, over time, if these were consistently not being rolled out as planned, then that was a strategic concern. CoG E says that this shows that the divide is not always easy to define.

APPENDIX H: Coding schedule.

Research Question 1:	**To what extent does prior experience shape each postholder's approach to the headteacher-CoG relationship?**			
a. What experience did each postholder have of headteacher-CoG relationships prior to appointment?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
1a.1	Extensive	1a.1.1	Previously been a head/CoG	
		1a.1.2	Had experience on a gov body	
1a.2	Some			
1a.3	None			
b. What were the principal influences that affected their approach and attitude?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
1b.1	Previous head or CoG experience	1b.1.1	Experience as head	
		1b.1.2	Experience as CoG	
1b.2	Chair or governor experience	1b.2.1	Observed previous CoG	
		1b.2.2	Chairing outside education	
1b.3	Training, qualification	1b.3.1	Formal head/gov training	
		1b.3.2	Other qualifications	
1b.4	Mentor, advice, luck	1b.4.1	Formal mentoring	
		1b.4.2	Chance interaction	

Research Question 2:	**To what extent is the future relationship between the headteacher and the CoG established through the appointment process (or at its earliest stages)?**			
a. From the perspective of Headteachers A to H, how significant was the CoG during their appointment process?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
2a.1	Positive impact	2a.1.1	Friendship	
		2a.1.2	Warmth, kindness	
		2a.1.3	Professional interest	
		2a.1.4	Similar values, background	
2a.2	Neutral impact			
2a.3	Negative impact			
2a.4	No involvement			
b. From the perspective of CoGs A to H, how significant was the headteacher during their appointment process?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
2b.1	Positive impact	2b.1.1	Honesty	
		2b.1.2	Likeability	
2b.2	Neutral impact			
2b.3	Negative impact			
2b.4	No involvement			

Research Question 3:	**Following appointment, how is the relationship between the headteacher and the CoG developed?**			
a. What is the pattern of communication between the headteacher and the CoG? How has this been established and has this changed over time?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
3a.1	Formal meetings	3a.1.1	Diarised	
		3a.1.2	Agenda/record taken	
3a.2	Informal contact	3a.2.1	Phone calls	
		3a.2.2	WhatsApp/text	
3a.3	Frequency	3a.3.1	Weekly	
		3a.3.2	Fortnightly	
		3a.3.3	Monthly	
		3a.3.4	Irregular/rare	
b. Is the relationship purely professional or is there a personal dimension as well? If so, what is the nature of this personal relationship and why is that seen as important?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
3b.1	Determinedly professional	3b.1.1	Head insistence on professionalism	
		3b.1.2	CoG insistence on professionalism	
3b.2	Personal concern or friendship	3b.2.1	Head: evidence of personal warmth/link	
		3b.2.2	CoG: evidence of personal warmth/link	

Research Question 4:	**How is the concept of 'critical friend' interpreted and practised by headteachers and CoGs?**			
a. What does the term 'critical friend' mean to headteachers and CoGs? Is the phrase helpful and does it reflect the essence of this relationship?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
4a.1	Ref to/definition of 'critical friend'	4a.1.1	By head	
		4a.1.2	By CoG	
b. How is the balance between 'support and challenge' successfully established between headteachers and CoGs?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
4b.1	Evidence of support	4b.1.1	By head re CoG	
		4b.1.2	By CoG re head	
4b.2	Evidence of challenge	4b.2.1	By head re CoG	
		4b.2.2	By CoG re head	

Research Question 5:		**How do headteachers and CoGs maintain an appropriate division between operational and strategic responsibility?**		
a. Are the boundaries of operational and strategic responsibility clearly defined? If they are, how was this arrived at and who was primarily responsible for determining these?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
5a.1	Boundaries clearly defined	5a.1.1	Head's view	
		5a.1.2	CoG's view	
b. Have there been times when this boundary has been crossed or blurred? What effect did this have on the relationship and how were any problems resolved?				
Code		**Sub-Code**		**Note**
5b.1	Boundaries crossed/blurred	5b.1.1	Head's view	
		5b.1.2	CoG's view	