School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation

by

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Statement of Originality

I, Maurice Brunning, hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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Glossary

Distributed leadership

This concept covers both system, district, and within-school approaches to sharing and devolving leadership responsibilities. SBM is taken as a form of distributed leadership but it might be more precisely described as "devolved leadership." Some literature confuses SBM and the various approaches to and definitions of distributed leadership, to the extent of using them interchangeably. Matters such as shared decision making and shared responsibilities could be considered as both SBM and distributed leadership.

Innovation

Innovation can be considered with a broad remit or it can be based on a more focused view:

"A phenomenon that ranges from continuous improvement of existing practices through to transformation of how we achieve goals, or rethinking what those goals are." (Victorian Education Department website)

Beswick et al. (2015) considered the difference between invention and innovation:

> Essentially, invention and innovation are two sides of the same coin – the yin and the yang. They complement each other and build on each other, yet in some ways are incredibly different. For while invention seeks to build on existing knowledge, to make something new or different; *innovation seeks to create lasting synergies and solutions.* In other words, invention looks at the 'what,' innovation looks at the 'how' (p. 5).

Local Schools, Local Decisions

The NSW Government's school based management (SBM) reform policy (colloquially called the 229 program). Introduced in 2012 and established as the blueprint for increased local management of all public schools in NSW predicated on the provision of increased local decision making and included increases in staffing and financial flexibility, the latter being based on the Resource Allocation Model (RAM).

NSW Department of Education

The NSW Department of Education (DoE) is a very large public education system and spans the support, funding, and governance of more than 2,200 schools that are spread across an extensive geographical area. It is the direct employer of all personnel (including school principals) who work in the NSW public education sector. The Department reports directly to the NSW Minister for Education.

NSW Secondary Principals Council (SPC)

The SPC is an active professional association that only NSW secondary and central school principals may join (www.nswspc.org.au). Its standing in the education profession in NSW is high. It has wide political and professional influence in NSW public education but can also work at the level of the individual principal if needs be.

School-based management (SBM)

There appears to be no definition of SBM that comprehensively covers the needs of this study, the outcomes of which promote SBM as a complex matter. The closest approach was from Dimmock (2013) who posited that the aim of SBM was to "devolve more powers and decentralise responsibilities to the school level" (p. 13). More detail about a working definition of SBM is provided in Chapter 2 – Literature Review.

Tri-level reform

A concept often referred to by Michael Fullan (2010) indicating that effective change strategies require actions and synergies from system, district, and school levels that provide an "allness" (his term) for reform strategies. The importance of these ideas is strengthened in Fullan and Quinn's most recent text (2016) emphasising the importance of Coherence.

List of Abbreviations

ATSI   Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

DoE   NSW Department of Education

HSC   Higher School Certificate

LSLD   Local Schools, Local Decisions policy

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA   Programme for International Student Assessment

SBM   School-based management

SPC   NSW Secondary Principals Council

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

In this thesis I interviewed eight experienced secondary principals about their perceptions of the drivers and impediments that were impacting their capacity to innovate, with particular reference to the place of school-based management (SBM). Given the practically oriented, context-specific, and focussed nature of this study's research questions, the seniority of the participants, and the inevitable complexity of detailed discussions about educational leadership with experienced principals, a multiple case study approach was used to provide maximum opportunity for meaningful outcomes. The methodology employed Mears' "gateway approach" (Mears, 2009) to delve deeply into the complex matters raised by the participants.

The evidence indicated that there was a significant imbalance between the number and relative importance of the positive drivers and the constraining impediments participants were faced with managing. Impediments far outweighed supportive drivers. At the school operations level, change was recognised by the participants as extraordinarily complex and the forces affecting it, highly interdependent and often frustratingly outside the influence of principals. Too few of the "right" types of drivers were well enough understood or implemented by the system—"wrong" drivers were clearly in evidence (Fullan, 2011).

In order to cope, participating principals indicated that they were using a broad, sometimes unconventional range of strategies to manage what they saw as an excess of system-generated impediments and shallowly devised and poorly implemented government initiatives. In contrast to the system rhetoric on the value of localism and the need to support difference, the majority of system policies were in effect instruments

for maintaining centralised control. They claimed that the current top-down, centralist, compliance-based policy milieu constrained their leadership, effectively placing a ceiling on "real-world" effectiveness.

The participants' views about the success of SBM as a reform were mixed. The extent of their local authority was unclear and its nature and scope insufficiently defined and understood to allow genuinely sustainable school-based innovation. They posited that to improve their situation, the system would require a deeper understanding of change processes, how they operate in functioning schools, and an acceptance of shared responsibility for ensuring that sustainable change was achievable.

Participating principals indicated that government and system goals such as increases in effective innovative practice and lifts in student achievement metrics were conceivably achievable. However, such achievements would be difficult without construction of a system culture where purpose, process, and responsibilities were agreed across all levels of the public education sector.

While the study was limited to a relatively small number of secondary principals in one system, the participants' statements left little doubt that a principal's capacity, determination, experience, and ability for professional networking could all impact on the success of their staff and students. Viable solutions to local problems entailed "working around" system constraints. Pursuing the "art of management" was discussed as a pre-requisite for any principal who aspired to achieve innovative outcomes and survive the demands of the role. The participants' professional organisation, the NSW Secondary Principals Council (SPC), and professional networking were seen as vital to meeting the challenges of leading and managing their schools.

Chapter 1

Introduction

We did a lot of work in the early 90s to see how principals perceived and responded to the demands of leading their schools but surprisingly little [research] has been done this way in recent years. A lot has changed since then and it is certainly time to go back down the "rabbit hole" to see how principals are coping with contemporary reform agendas in education.

Personal communication with Sir Michael Barber, May 22, 2015, following the ACER Leading Thinkers in Conversation Workshop, Cockle Bay Wharf, Sydney

This study sought to understand the responses of practicing secondary school principals to what is widely recognised as an era when governments everywhere are seeking strategies to achieve sweeping educational reform (Caldwell, 2004; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell, & Weldon, 2011; Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves, 2005a; NSW Department of Education, 2013, 2015; Townsend, 2011). So numerous and widespread are these efforts that Bates (2013) has

referred to the contemporary educational reform agenda as a "policy epidemic" (p. 38).

However, mounting evidence shows that, even where these polices are purposefully

crafted by eminent educational authorities, there is no guarantee that effective,

sustainable reform will follow (Fullan, 2000b, 2001, 2003, 2011; Günbayi, 2011;

Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

The extensive literature on educational reform indicated that many systems and

governments are still encountering difficulties. Schools are generally recognised as

being driven as much by political and economic concerns based on current social

milieus as by student requirements or genuinely altruistic, system-wide initiatives

(Hopson, Schiller, & Lawson, 2014; Hughes & Brock, 2008; Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016; Spring, 2015; Williams &

Johnson, 2013). Educational reform is influenced in different countries by different

factors. For example, Sahlberg (2007) pointed to the relative uniqueness of the well-

regarded Finnish approaches to education. He noted they were built on broader societal

influences that can be found only in Finland. He also pointed to the global forces that

are influencing educational reform, in particular, competitive, market-driven

accountability processes and a pervading emphasis on literacy and numeracy among

Western nations.

Given the prioritisation and seemingly universal push for educational reform, it

seems apposite to ask why so little progress has been made. Some of the world's most

influential educators have ruminated on what makes educational change so difficult to

achieve and sustain. Issues identified include reconciling school autonomy and

centralised governance (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Moos, Skedsmo, Höög, Olofsson, &

Johnson, 2011; Wöbmann, Lüdemann, Schütz, & West, 2007); the embeddedness of

school change in longer term system initiatives (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006);

principals' knowledge of change management and effective instruction (Edmonds, 1982; Hattie & Yates, 2013); barriers between teachers and administrators (Guskey, 1997); ineffective accountability frameworks (Barber, 2004; Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014); under-recognition of the crucial importance of positive cultures and teacher "quality" (Barber & Mourshed, 2007); navigating school micro-politics (Blasé, 2005); and, a lack of appreciation of the need to build professional capital in every school (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Day (2002) pointed to the diversity of demands upon the time, energy, and expertise of a principal's daily environment, emphasising that the excessive demands placed upon principalship apply almost universally across contemporary education among Western nations.

The current investigation was designed to engage with secondary (high school) principals about their perceptions of the drivers and impediments that impact change in their schools, with particular reference to the place of school-based management (SBM) reform. There has been a great deal of debate in educational circles in many countries, not least of all in Australia, about the efficacy of SBM, what gains and losses it might engender, and in what circumstances it might succeed (Altrichter, Heinrich, & Soukup-Altrichter, 2014; Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2012; Clark, 2009; Gamage, 2009; Gobby, 2013; Hanushek, Link, & Woessmann, 2013; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008; Wöbmann et al., 2007). Many of these authors, while accepting that SBM might be supposed to empower principals, pointed to the complexity of the issues in terms of understanding the "real-world" efficacy of SBM. The aim of this study was to delve deeply into the matter of SBM efficacy from a practicing principal's point of view and to investigate the ways in which SBM might be assisting or impeding innovative practice. How does SBM impact the specifics of school context, system policies, innovation planning, and principal experience?

Holmes, Clement, and Albright (2013), in discussing why long term goals can be difficult to achieve in schools, pointed to the crucial relationship between SBM and the broader drivers of change. They noted that the "trend towards greater empowerment of principals heightens the need for the development of a better understanding of the drivers of change in schools and the characteristics required of those in leadership positions" (p. 274). This study sought to understand if there was a relationship between SBM and innovative practice in schools. While it is not suggested that SBM is a requirement for successful innovation (Gamage, 2009; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 2009), it is widely recognised as a substantial and ongoing policy direction for New South Wales (NSW) as it is for jurisdictions throughout Australia (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2012). As Caro (2012) noted:

> School autonomy remains a hot potato. Increased autonomy is popular among those who see public schools as hamstrung by bureaucracy and/or union rules. Some would like to see the schools operate entirely independently; others would merely like more power given to principals and administrators to manage their schools to meet the wishes of their community. (p. 13)

Caro's comment provides some insight into why SBM and its relationship to the practice of school operations is complex and it points to the possibility that this matter could generate adversarial approaches among interested parties.

The outcomes of this study have illuminated a number of issues of significance to contemporary reform efforts: the extent to which innovation rests on the capacity of principals to effectively enact SBM; how school context can interact with drivers and impediments to support or overwhelm local reform efforts; how subsidiarity—as currently conceived for the NSW system—plays out at the school, local administrative, district, and system levels; and, how complex forces for change, such as SBM, assist or

impede a principal's effectiveness. It also investigated the significant tensions between the policy rationale for increasing SBM, and the realities of its implementation as perceived by practicing principals.

While the findings from this study should be tempered by its methodological limitations, the evidence presented by participants indicates a series of important considerations in terms of the research questions. Broadly speaking, the impediments appeared to outweigh the supportive factors, the positive drivers, at least as far as the participating principals were concerned. The participants discussed the inefficacious nature of the system's "one-size-fits-all" policy settings. They consistently indicated that the complexity of their work was exacerbated by a lack of clarity and agreement about purpose and a lack of system coherence. They were unclear about the extent of their authority. There was a deeply held and clearly articulated view among the principals that professional relationships were continually hampered by an "us and them" mentality upheld by both system and school personnel. Participating principals indicated that they needed to operate to a greater or lesser extent outside the system that was supposed to support them.

Background

This section briefly discusses three interrelated forces backgrounding contemporary reform agendas in school education that are of particular relevance for the current study. These are: burgeoning globalisation, increasing decentralisation and trends towards SBM, and the affirmation of the primacy of principals in the leadership of schools. The discussion will begin by considering the pressures that globalisation brings to the educational reform debate.

Globalisation

Marginson (1999) refers to globalisation as "the formation of world systems, as distinct from internationalization which presupposes nations as the essential unit" (p. 19). Globalisation is important as it is recognised as a dominant force driving disruption and reform in education throughout the modern world (Marginson, 1999; OECD, 2016a). As Castells (2009) explained, **"**state control over space and time is increasingly bypassed by global flows of capital, goods, services, technology, communication and information" (p. 33). In examining the disruptive forces at play for many national economies, Castells highlighted Finland as an example of how important it was for societies to build sustainable change by providing a "human resource base" that could deal with significant, ongoing reforms. He noted that the Finnish approach, while successful in recognising the importance of effective human resource responses to change, was not the norm. Most nations continued to struggle to manage the disruptive economic forces they were experiencing and Marginson further noted that "education institutions are more politically central than ever, yet they also seem to be weakened, fallen from a former high estate, hostage to the diminishing of the nation-state's room to move and its growing fiscal constraints" (p. 30).

A key understanding underpinning this study was that such global pressures ultimately impact policy measures such as SBM and possibly, innovative capacity at the school level. While only one of the participating principals directly engaged with this dynamic at interview, seeing it as the real driving force for educational reform, other participants clearly recognised that their principalship was nested in global frameworks of change (Chapter 4). School leaders in the current study acknowledged the changing worlds they and their students inhabited.

The following section positions SBM in the school reform landscape within this globalised context.

SBM as a Theory of Change and Reform

School autonomy and accountability play a leading part in reform efforts to improve educational outcomes in many jurisdictions (Agasisti & Zoido, 2015). Arguments in favour of greater autonomy include the capacity to make better local decisions, for local accountability to be valued and for increased opportunity for innovation (Caldwell, 2012, 2015, 2016). Referring to the value of accountability, Barber (2004) placed devolved responsibility within the performance management framework for any improving school. Arguments against take the view that SBM may not be universally effective, there can be inappropriate decisions made locally, and a lack of standardisation and focus across a system can lead to lowered student outcomes. (Caldwell, 2012; Fullan, 2000a; Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Dimmock (2013) summarised the interest in SBM as follows:

Notwithstanding the elements of centralisation within restructuring, the prevailing thrust of reform is towards school based management. In essence, the aim is to devolve more powers and decentralise responsibilities to the school level. While more decision making in the allocation of resources used by the school is transferred to the school level, school based personnel are generally held accountable for their performance and for student outcomes achieved. (p. 13)

This view encapsulates the contemporary SBM policy agenda in NSW, stressing the need for a deeper understanding about the dynamic interplay of forces operating to drive

local autonomy, assist innovation, and sustain accountability. In this study, the way these forces were perceived by practicing school principals was of primary interest but also, their perceptions provided insights into the wider school reform agenda.

The Centrality of Leadership in Schools

In this study, a key assumption was that the principal was the right person to focus on because principals' decisions can impact on their learning communities holistically, affecting not just students and staff but community members as well. Gamage (2009) has pointed to the importance of the principal in shaping schools:

It is the responsibility and the mission of the school leader to select the appropriate path for his or her school as the school community is likely to look to the principal or the head for guidance. Whether the principal wants to develop a democratic, high performing school with a satisfied professional group, or a mediocre, bureaucratic school where the differences of opinions and initiatives will be suppressed and discouraged depends on the principle that the person adopts. (p. 104)

Notions about the importance of the principal, and the quest for ever more effective school leadership, were reported upon in an OECD study that involved over 20 countries (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). Pont, Nusche, and Moorman pointed to the importance of factors impacting that study's participating principals including the limitations of "one-size-fits-all" and "us-and-them" thinking. Notions of this kind can culminate in a lack of respect for school leadership and a lack of system coherence that can impede innovation in schools. The implications of the OECD's work were that schools and systems need to think more deeply about the best ways of developing

effective policies, supporting effective principals, and of agreeing on the broader goals and purposes of education. The OECD study commented:

> If we are to move towards a system based on informed professional judgement, capacity has to be built both at the school and system level as both schools and government learn new ways of working, establish new norms of engagement and build more flexible and problem oriented work cultures. (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008, p. 32)

A number of studies have canvassed similar issues, but of particular interest to this study was the work that has been done on principals' perspectives about change. Hallinger, Murphy, and Hausman (1992) discussed principals' perspectives on change, accountability, restructuring, teaching and learning, and curriculum, and suggested that "their beliefs emphasize the myriad difficulties associated with fundamental reform and its implementation" (p. 1). As with the current study, Hallinger et al. (1992) found that principals' perceptions, whether positive or negative, seemed almost always to be accompanied by caveats and contextual complexities relating to innovation, change, and reform. Many of the ideas and themes that made principalship difficult, as reported by Hallinger over 25 years ago, were still evident in some parts of this study's data.

This study used a theoretical frame of mediated activity and relevant criteria for the study included matters of school and principal effectiveness, devolved leadership, reform efforts at various levels, leadership capacity, and the encompassing matter of cultural change in schools and systems (or the lack thereof). One question that needed to be answered following consideration of relevant literature was how a school leader might react to increases in school autonomy, not from a theoretical perspective, but from a practicing principal's point of view as they led their school. Pont, Nusche, and Moorman (2008) emphasised that "at the school-systems interface, school leadership

provides a bridge between internal school improvement processes and externally initiated reform" (p. 16). Pont, Nusche, and Moorman's statement points to a dynamic concept; principals managing and leading their schools while experiencing the strictures of both internal and external environments. The exploration of this notion was of pivotal importance for this study.

SBM in NSW

Schools in most countries are facing a period of unprecedented reform and this has placed far greater demands and accountabilities on principals and other school leaders for management matters that have traditionally been system-level responsibilities (Barber, 2004; Dinham et al., 2011; Pont, Nusche, & Hopkins, 2008; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). In NSW government schools, the changes towards increased levels of SBM are embedded in the Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD) policy, more colloquially known as the "229 schools program." Following an SBM pilot program run in 47 NSW schools from 2009 to 2011, the NSW Government's LSLD policy began implementation in 2012. This policy was a key reform for NSW public education, a large system that is comprised of over 2,200 schools. Over time, every NSW public school will be impacted by the LSLD initiative (NSW Department of Education, 2017) and every school will receive a Resource Allocation Model or "RAM" grant, a funding allocation designed to allow principals to achieve increased local financial and staffing control.

Three important motivations for increased SBM in NSW may be identified. Firstly, the Federal Government had been seeking increased decentralisation in schooling models (and tying funding availability to their requirements). Secondly, some senior politicians and bureaucrats subscribed to the view that SBM might improve and

even transform the decision quality and effectiveness of school leaders (Van Oord, 2013). Thirdly, public schools were losing "market share" to the private sector and this was underwritten by complex changes to middle class perceptions of education, not to mention neoliberal thinking by contemporary governments (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009).

The literature points to the complex, ambivalent, many-faceted, and sometimes contentious nature of SBM as an enabler of school success. The aim of this study therefore was to specifically explore the thoughts of practicing principals on such matters. Hargreaves and Ainscow (2015) commented that "the history of bottom-up innovation and individual school autonomy is not impressive" (p. 43). Codd (2005), discussing what he sees as the unsuccessful nature of New Zealand's system-driven reform agenda—where schools have had a great amount of local control but increased bureaucratic intervention—indicated that "the cumulative effects of such (neo-liberal) policies have in effect reduced professional accountability to a form of managerial control" (p. 204). Other researchers and commentators have called for change efforts to focus on building professional capacity and professional capital (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015) rather than embracing SBM per se. Kimmelman (2010) placed innovation squarely in the setting of operating a school, pointing to how a teacher "team" can implement, assess, and support innovative practice when given a suitable framework. As Pont, Nusche, and Moorman (2008) indicated:

> School autonomy alone does not guarantee school improvement. Unless school leaders have the capacity, motivation and support to make use of their autonomy to engage in the practices that are most conducive to improved learning, school autonomy may have little influence on school outcomes. (p. 64)

My study has explored principals' views on the efficacy of SBM in the real-world setting of their NSW schools. At the same time, the research questions explored related notions of leadership development and the types of evidence and strategic approaches that principals used to try to drive innovation in their schools, as well as the thinking underpinning these efforts.

Statement of the Problem

Relevant literature tends to lack well-founded and contextually grounded detail about the impacts of SBM on practicing principals' views. This study aimed to contribute to the debate about the impact of SBM and other matters; for example, the system's subsidiarity settings, which may influence a principal's capacity to increase the level of school-based innovation. During the research process, a series of related questions arose that backgrounded data gathering. Does SBM actually facilitate innovation? Do the principals really have enough authority to make crucial local decisions? Do they have sufficient management flexibility to manage the necessary resources? Can they build a suitable local culture? How do they design and rationalise local initiatives? Are principals, local stakeholders, system officials, and federal and state governments really working coherently? What are the forces, the drivers, and the impediments and conditions for success that really assist principals to lead innovative, successful schools? Does the available bureaucratic support for principals help or hinder their efforts?

The problem was that to really understand the reasons why educational change in schools so often fails, we need to obtain first-hand evidence of the significant issues that are helping or hindering school leaders from achieving their goals for innovation and reform (going "back down the rabbit hole" as Sir Michael Barber put it). Solving

this problem was made both more complex and more relevant by the increasing extent

of SBM in the current policy milieu, as represented by Local Schools, Local Decisions

(LSLD), and the NSW system's presumption (as well as the Federal Government's

presumption) that SBM would necessarily assist principals to facilitate reform.

A great deal more information and depth of understanding was needed to come

to terms with such important concerns. How effective a principal can be in obtaining

and sustaining innovation in their school will be dependent on a complex mix of school

context, personal capacity, perceptions and responses, leadership and management

experience, the impacts of system policy, interventions on their decision capacity, and

their capacity to influence staff (Benavides, Dumont, & Istance, 2008; Bentley, 2008;

Fullan, 2011; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Larsen &

Rieckhoff, 2014; Pont, Nusche, & Hopkins, 2008). Policies such as LSLD rest on an

individual principal's ability to obtain accurate information about the issues of their

context and to make good decisions based on it, and as all principals are different,

research needs to explore the impact of such policies on a case-by-case basis. If we

acknowledge that each school is different and each principal unique, then it follows that

in-depth case study examination of practicing principals was needed to shed light on

current reform agendas and to help guide further research.

My study worked within a complex amalgam of forces to engage principals at

the personal level in the hope of offering more than superficial insights and solutions to

real-world leadership problems. As previously mentioned, there was strikingly scant

literature on school reform, SBM, and the forces that help and hinder school innovation

at the school level that was based on first-hand and context-specific information from

practicing principals. The influential OECD report on the search for innovative learning

environments pointed to the importance (inter alia) of ensuring "consideration of

innovative learning experiences and environments in the field" (Benavides et al., 2008, p. 22). An important facet of this study was a focus on those operational factors that could enable innovation. It is important to scrutinise the challenges facing principals, particularly if any supporting processes or impediments are embedded in system policies intended to facilitate innovation.

In researching complex, situational problems at the personal level, such as those involving senior professional educators, the matters raised by the participants often requires a capacity for deep knowledge and understanding and genuine empathy on the part of the investigator so that the critical nuances can be revealed (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2009).

As the researcher, I bring to this task professional experience in education of 22 years in various senior roles (secondary principal, superintendent, director, senior projects leader) including 10 years as a member of the NSW Government's Senior Executive Service. The experiences of such roles has assisted my understanding of the participants' statements, of the interplay between the forces of difficulty and support that the principals were describing, and of the nuanced detail that a study such as this must engage with if maximum knowledge gains are to be obtained.

The participating principals were simultaneously senior employees of the NSW Department of Education (DoE); members of the NSW Secondary Principals Council; and, members of the NSW Teachers Federation (with one exception). Each (with one exception) was a qualified and highly experienced teacher practitioner who had risen through the ranks of the profession to the position of secondary principal and held that position for a period of years. This common background provided the starting point for positioning this study.

Design, Procedures, and Limitations

Schoenfeld (1999) discussed a number of issues relating to doctoral study including problems relating to over-specialisation by less experienced researchers. This author pointed to matters such as superficiality, compartmentalisation, and simplistic approaches to study methodologies as potentially problematic for doctoral students trying to make sense of and justify claims about their findings. In developing this research project, there was an unavoidable focusing, a narrowing of scope, to make the work meaningful and manageable. With this came an inherent set of limitations and risks, the potential for over-simplification and excessive specialisation on the part of the researcher that needed to be recognised.

The inherent limitations in this research included the limited scale of the research (eight participants), the potential for bias due to the background of the researcher (further discussed in Chapter 3), and the limited scope to theorise and generalise due to limited sample size (Chapter 7). This research did not take a simplistic approach that would hinder deep understanding of the complex, interrelated educational phenomena that were being investigated. Indeed, the design was about finding deep meaning in the perceptions of participating principals as they engaged with the leadership of their schools in an environment of change.

The methodology used in this study, as explained in detail in Chapter 3, was based on a multiple case study approach that relied on the perceptions of the participating principals. Twenty-three interviews took place. The same participants were engaged on multiple occasions to maximise depth of understanding about the matters that they raised. As the interviews proceeded, the information that had been gathered, both individually and collectively, dictated the direction of subsequent inquiry. Given the plethora of variables that could make such a study as this excessively difficult and

overwhelming (or too trivial), the decision was made to work only with experienced secondary principals. In one case, the participant also had extensive management experience in industry.

Underpinning Concepts

Michael Fullan's work on the right (and wrong) drivers for achieving coherent and sustainable system-wide reform (Fullan, 2011; Fullan & Quinn, 2016) provided a preliminary framework for this study's efforts at taking a "deeper dive" into practical, school-level leadership and management. Over many years, Fullan has played an influential role in NSW as a senior advisor on educational reform to the Government, senior system officials, and school leaders. He has been involved in a number of NSW reforms and he has visited the state on multiple occasions. Over an extensive period, he has influenced the DoE Secretary and Deputy Secretaries, a number of Superintendents and Education Directors, both directly and indirectly through his ideas, and has frequently spoken at principals 'conferences. He has also provided papers based on his views that were designed to provide the state's schools (both private and public) with specific solutions to educational problems. It was therefore apposite to use his work for the preliminary framing of my research. However, as the methodology chapter presents, there were other crucial elements supporting the theoretical framing of the study, and these helped to shed light on how cultural change in schools and systems can be achieved while taking into account the issues of devolved leadership (SBM).

There was broad support in the literature for Fullan's view (Fullan, 2011) that supportive school and system cultures, positive work climate, high quality professional communities, and sound interpersonal relationships were instrumental in achieving sustainable reform. For example, prominent researchers such as MacNeil, Prater, and

Busch (2009), Marsh, Waniganayake, and De Nobile (2014), and Hargreaves and Ainscow (2015), all advocate cultural change and relationship development as a vital part of educational reform processes at any level. Throughout his research and comment, Fullan (2000a, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2010; Fullan & Quinn, 2016) has constantly referred to the complexities of school leadership, and the intersection between school leadership and system (and district) policy and processes. The current study hopes to shed additional light on effective leadership in an SBM environment, and in particular the capacity to innovate. It considers this issue in a context where a myriad of other influences and pragmatic realities, like the impact of local personalities, government- and community-provided finance, existing bureaucratic directions, policy ambiguities, concerns about staff and staffing processes, the value or otherwise of peers and supervisors, and the role of principal associations and unions all impact the efficacy of principal autonomy.

Related to the pragmatic realities of school leadership and management, Fullan (2014) posited that as schools increasingly work collaboratively towards improvement, they will inevitably become critically engaged with external standards and policy implementation. Of particular importance to this study was his idea that schools cannot change on their own. Understandings of this kind are of pivotal importance because this study places principal leadership within a large system. Can SBM facilitate a better foundation for the "right" drivers to take hold in the case study schools? How might the impact of the "wrong" drivers on local reforms be minimised as a part of, or possibly in spite of, SBM?

My study has also led to a consideration of the importance of how investigations about the practical aspects of SBM impact on school governance and supervision, and on the traditionally hierarchical interactions between different levels of a system.

Altrichter et al. (2014) undertook extensive research in Austria into how school autonomy, school differentiation, and hierarchisation relate to one another. Their views on policy transmission and receipt were of particular interest:

> In order to understand changes in governance we must attend to the ways policy "offers" are translated and appropriated by actors on "lower" levels of the education system, in particular at the school level. (p. 692)

In my study, the participating principals saw their approaches to policy implementation at the local level, and their relationships with the system and its officers, as pivotal to their operational success including their ability to innovate.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides an opportunity to examine the drivers and impediments to change as described by practicing principals, and position these amongst the forces influencing both the real-world effectiveness of the principalship and broader agendas relating to educational reform. In the process it examines the complexity of contemporary school leadership and the environments that impact innovative practice. The schools in this study were part of the NSW public education system, and this system's policies and cultures are an integral part of the participants' leadership environment. Consequently, this study was also significant for its analysis of how eight school leaders and the system within which they work interact and respond to complex reform agendas.

There was in my view a clear and pressing need for increasingly contextualised, detailed, and grounded knowledge about the relationships between SBM and innovation, and about the drivers and impediments that affect principals' capacity to lead sustained educational change. The study contributes to this debate through an

improved understanding of "real-world" school and principal effectiveness. Hallinger and Heck's (1996) critique of the major empirical studies on principal effectiveness over a 15-year period surmised that:

> The greatest progress in this field will yield from research that places the principal in the context of the school and the environment. This has both theoretical and methodological implications. As we tried to demonstrate, designs that explore the effects of the environment and principal leadership separately are inherently limited. (p. 34)

They continued:

> A finding that principal effects were mediated by other in-school variables does nothing whatsoever to diminish the principal's importance. Understanding the routes by which principals can improve school outcomes by working with others is itself a goal worthy for research. (p. 39)

This statement provides a measure of justification for undertaking my research.

Although almost 20 years old, these insights remain a startlingly poignant call to rally ongoing research efforts. My study was designed to shed light on a range of issues relating to a principal's capacity to innovate from the often pragmatic standpoint of eight participating principals. Many diverse views were expressed during the interviews. To make the analysis manageable and justify some possible ways forward (Chapter 8), these views were ultimately consolidated into four emergent themes. The broader implications of these were examined and analysed (Chapter 7). The study provides a fresh lens for considering the relative importance of the positive and negative forces experienced by the participants, and how these interact to impact on their innovative practice.

Structure of the Thesis

This is an eight-chapter thesis. Chapter 1 (Introduction) begins by setting out the overall approach and importance of the study including a brief indication of its key outcomes, a statement of the problem, study design, relevant background concepts, and study significance. As a study based on practicing principals' perceptions and conducted by a researcher with significant industry experience, mention is made of possible limitations. The chapter positions the study within the broader field of educational research. Later chapters of this thesis provide insight, greater detail, and scholarly comment about these and other related matters that arose as a result of this research.

The early part of Chapter 2 (Literature Review) describes the conceptual model used to capture the multifaceted nature of the local, societal, and systemic influences that affect school reform. My reading covered over 250 articles in the fields of SBM, educational change, school cultures, principal and school effectiveness, coherence, and global influences, which provided depth and substance to my thinking and guided the development of the model. By identifying the array of external, intervening, and internal factors operating as "circles of influence" over school operations, this model was designed as a heuristic device to guide the progress of this literature review and later analysis. Within this framework, the review identifies broad societal influences over school leadership and reform, and more direct and immediate impacts on principalship and the role of principals in SBM and innovation at the school level.

Chapter 3 (Methodology) sets out the context, rationale, design, and methodology for the study. This study adopts a qualitative, multiple case study research design that utilises activity theory as its theoretical frame. The chapter sets out and explains the four research questions and criteria for the selection of cases. It goes on to

describe the development of the interview protocols based on the "gateway approach" of Mears (2009). This chapter concludes with an exploration of who the researcher is and the potential impacts of his experiences on the study.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the interview results. Chapter 4 includes details of the approach used for data gathering, coding, and verification. It then presents a generalised background of the participating principals and their schools and related ethical considerations. Care has been taken to explain the unique contributions of the case study principals. Themes and sub-themes were identified from the "first pass" coding of the phase 1 face-to-face interviews and the chapter concludes with an explanation of the process, following the gateway principles, used to derive the phase 2 interview protocol.

Chapter 5 mirrors the structure of Chapter 4, but delves more deeply into principals' perceptions to provide specific and more individualised views, before further refining the initial themes. The four major themes that emerged from phases 1 and 2 are explicated.

Chapter 6 presents the third and final round of interview results, phase 3. All three interview phases contributed to Chapter 7 (Analysis) where the four major themes that developed as a result of all the interview findings and the answers to the research questions are discussed in detail in relation to relevant literature. This is followed by a summary of the key points developed.

Chapter 8 sets out some possible ways forward, a summary of the key findings of the study and matters in need of further clarification. It concludes with the identification of significant issues that stem from the findings including a discussion of the overriding matter of cultural change.

Conclusion

In seeking to understand the interview responses of the experienced, practicing secondary principals who participated in this study, it became clear that there was a great deal of commonality among the matters they raised, even though their schools exhibited widely different contexts. A range of views were always present but importantly for analysis of their comments, those views often centred on common themes. A diagram to be found towards the beginning of Chapter 7 provides a pictorial summary. As might be expected, there were also significant differences between the views of each participating principal on some matters that arose during the interviews. These points of difference were valuable to give the broadest possible perspective to the study's outcomes and, from a procedural point of view, also served as a form of member checking. Every participant spoke with a deep knowledge of the complex matters that arose as the study progressed. Participants spoke from a point of strength, secure in their position, reflective about their concerns. They provided evidence of their comprehensive knowledge about the issues that they put forward.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in
the actual task of schooling…. belief in this grass-roots approach to the control
of the schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively
discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people
responsible for carrying them out.

Karmel (1973, p. 10)

Introduction

A great many researchers and commentators have contributed to views about
school and principal effectiveness, and the processes and circumstances where they
might be effective (Brady, 2014; Day, Harris, & Whitfield, 1999; Dimmock, 2013;
Edmonds, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). The methodological approach for the current
study was in keeping with Edmond's (1982) and Day et al.'s (1999) views that pointed
to effective schooling as being closely linked to the operational approaches taken within

schools. My study narrows this notion to considerations of how practicing principals respond to their internal and external environments, and to the supports, pressures, and impediments that they must work within if they are to improve their students' outcomes. Of particular relevance were principals' views about increases in SBM and how these might relate to educational effectiveness.

Despite the extensive research available about the leadership of schools, there has been surprisingly little work done on principals' *perceptions*, research examining the complex demands of their roles, and in particular, the positive drivers and impediments they believe they are experiencing as they try to generate innovation and reform in their schools. During my reading of the literature it became clear that there was limited material available regarding principal perceptions in the context of ongoing contemporary change agendas, like SBM or site-based innovation, and how systems might respond to such initiatives. Within the specific context of NSW public education as the largest public education provider in Australia, I could find no specific work examining practicing principals' perceptions about the efficacy of SBM in secondary schools, how that might operate to improve or impede innovative practice, and how the system's culture and policies interacted with those perceptions.

Caldwell (2016) examined four Australian case studies of schools with increased autonomy to ascertain if there was a cause-and-effect link between increased local control and student achievement. He found that links existed for the schools he had studied, but also noted that leadership quality was important. He concluded:

> Other studies in Australia and elsewhere should deal with cases where schools take up the higher level of autonomy that has been granted but have failed to make an impact. Particular attention should be given to how the role of the system changes and the kinds of support that schools receive. (p. 1183)

These case studies while useful in providing background information were at best tangential to the questions that my research was attempting to answer. Notwithstanding this, the role of the system and the support that schools received during a period of increasing SBM in NSW feature prominently in the data this study has gathered.

The material in this chapter scopes the extent and nature of the literature relevant to this research, but in many ways it is not a typical literature review. The departure from a standard academic review of the literature was necessary to support the methodological approach taken based on mediated activity. Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of interlocking fields, a picture of the relevant parts of an educational ecosystem that practicing principals likely inhabit. The diagram follows a layers of influence theme. It moves from the broad societal level influences that impact school principals and education as a whole, towards material with more direct and immediate impact on principal leadership and effectiveness. The design of this diagram acknowledges that such impacts are multidirectional. The focuses here are on SBM, innovation, and how leaders interact with the organisations they are part of, and, it includes relevant dimensions that impact, either directly or indirectly, principals' roles and effectiveness.

One way to understand issues of complexity and symbiotic behaviour is to consider the whole as an ecosystem. Goldstein, Hazy, and Lichtenstein (2010) suggested that:

> An ecosystem is the most accurate picture of what a complex, nonlinear, adaptive, and interactive system is all about. No sub-ecosystem can survive on its own. Instead, the vast set of interchange and exchange that connects one to another enables the entire ecology to thrive. (p. 8)

The ecosystem within which this research is located was the dynamic nexus between SBM, system and government policy, and principals' perceptions about their effectiveness.

Partial inspiration and justification for this literature review model came from Fullan (2000b) whose research discussed three "stories" of educational reform as inside, outside-in, and inside-out. He explains that:

> The main reason for the failure of these reforms to go to scale and to endure is that we have failed to understand that both local school development and the quality of the surrounding infrastructure are critical for lasting success. (p. 581)

What became apparent during the construction of the model was that a great many matters can and do impact principal leadership. The design of a useful model had to incorporate crucial factors of influence, but not be overwhelmed by all the possible influences that an educational ecosystem could encompass. Ultimately, the model chosen became an aid to navigating the available, applicable literature and the diagram here is a refinement of the initial one. It was developed into its final form following an iterative process of reading while considering initial broad questions and notions about principal leadership that would in time become the actual research questions. My approach to its development was essentially meta-analytic in terms of the literature, but its development also involved my extensive professional experience in the field as a senior system official, principal, curriculum consultant, and teacher. Its final development also included extensive discussions with my supervisors, who brought to those discussions broader theories and ideas that could impact my research.

It is inevitable that researchers have to make informed choices and decisions (Creswell, 2008). Boote and Beile (2005) posit that doctoral candidates must be able to defend their literature review choices and I trust that I have done so. Their approach to

the literature and their decisions about relevance should be based on a broad view of the literature. In the end, I chose a scheme that was not simplistic but that could thoroughly inform my study, be an effective aid to organising this literature review, and not be so complex that clarity and usefulness were lost. The issue of simplicity was important because as I undertook reading, it became clear that many of the authors, whether involved in comment, research, or theory development, seemed not to provide sufficient information as to whether their suggested approaches could stand against the test of hard, in-school realities. Bates (2013) claimed that system policy makers typically function in an "abstract" frame—one that *they* might see as working in real operational settings—but that often, this view was not shared by the principals who were expected to implement and manage such policies in their schools. Making matters more difficult for principals was the "unreality" of many policies that they were expected to enact.
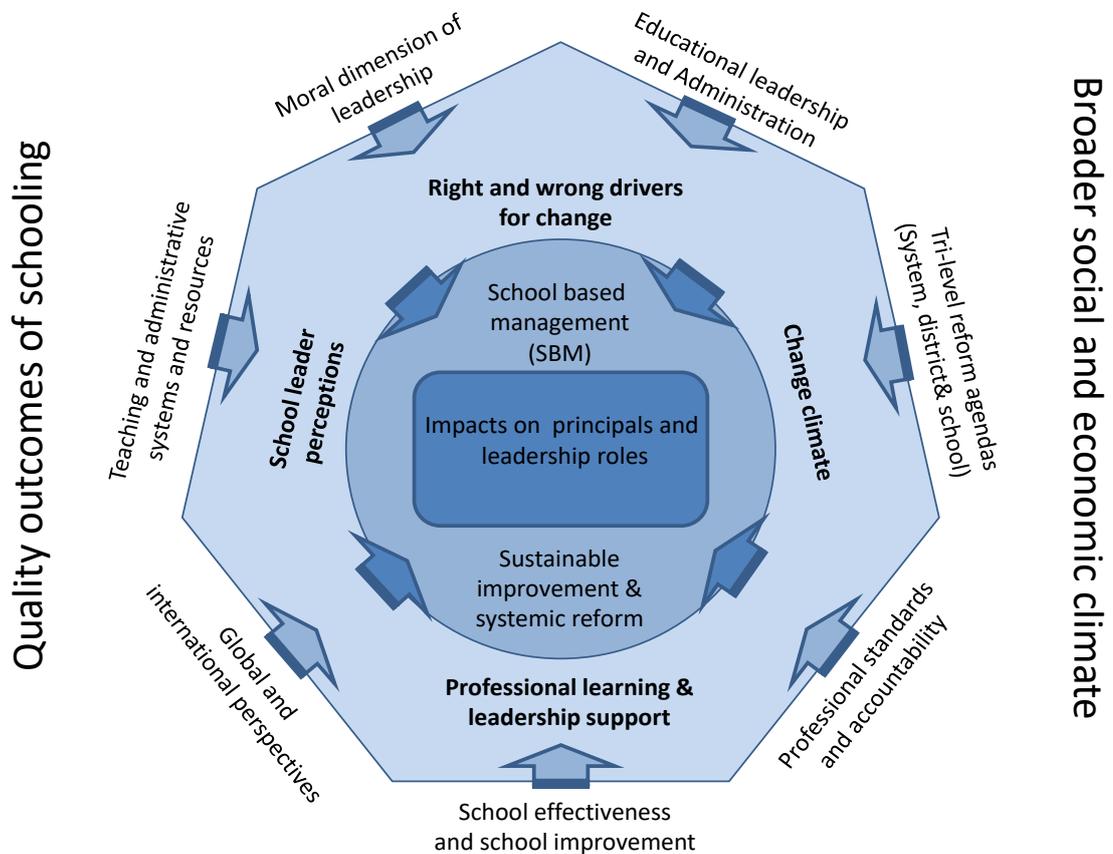
Figure 1. A heuristic model of the literature assisting this research.

This review scopes the literature but in doing so it also provides a lens for viewing the issues that arose during data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the condensed headings below provide a framework to help develop data themes into meaningful levels of abstraction. Naturally, there was some overlap between the scholarly materials developed under each heading.

- The broader educational context

- School-based management and system reform

- Accountability and standards

- "Right" and "wrong" drivers

- Principal roles and effectiveness

- Leadership, purpose, and perception

- Context, climate, and culture

- Coherence

The Broader Educational Context

School leaders work in a dynamic, complex, socio-political, economically influenced context (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004; Seashore, 2009). This environment intertwines schools and their leadership in broader nets of economic and political forces, and education system influences, constraints, and entrenched ambiguities that can help or hinder success in accomplishing educational innovation (Biesta, 2009; Blasé, 2005; Clark, 2009; Codd, 2005; DeMoss & Wong, 2013; Fullan, 2000a; Hargreaves, 2005b). For example, Codd (2005) provided detailed insights into the New Zealand experience of teachers as managed professionals, emphasising the influence of political ideologies

and the limitations of managerialism and business thinking in supporting educational reform:

> [T]he welfare state is the product of social democracy. It is the institutional embodiment of the struggle for citizenship rights: that is, rights to health, education and employment opportunities, within a social environment of collective responsibility and national identity. In contrast, neo-liberalism emphasises individual rights to property ownership, legal protection and market freedom, within a social environment of enterprise and competition. Each of these social constructions of the citizen has particular implications for education policy. (p. 195)

Karen Seashore (2009) emphasised the dynamic and multi-factored nature of educational systems and how they appear to be perennially in flux. She noted: "If organizations are seen as gardens, then leaders cannot command them to grow. They must contend with the unpredictability, environmental influences, teamwork and risk factors that characterize trying to help anything develop" (p. 131). Caldwell (2004) posited that "leading the transformation of schools is a complex and challenging endeavour, whether it is for ministers of education at the level of government or for principals at the level of the local community" (p. 81).

In the *Fourth Way*, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) pointed towards the increasing complexity and growing sophistication of the moral, economic, and political imperatives operating in the educational environment that can influence how principals operate within their schools and communities. They stated that this "fourth way" could raise standards, deepen learning, and improve creativity in the pursuit of education outcomes. His central argument was that these gains would involve engaging in productive partnerships between the people, the profession, and the government, and

pushing beyond "target-obsessed distractions and data-driven decision making" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 71). Relating to this idea of partnerships are embedded concepts about the power of learning for everybody involved in reform, that all those involved in such partnerships would need to undertake constant learning and thoughtful approaches to change and, according to Hargreaves et al. (2009), this would specifically involve "leaders who can pull responsible, qualified, and highly capable teachers together in the pursuit of improvement" (p. 87).

Fullan (2001) called for a greater focus on issues of system commitment and school capacity to solve complex problems" rather than the relentless pursuit of initiative after initiative by systems and governments, as such an approach could and did cause burnout and resentment among those people who could actually implement tangible change: teachers. This dynamic was usually exacerbated because during the implementation of educational initiatives, irrespective of the jurisdiction being considered, a "dip"—a slowing—of the change processes almost always occurred after the early flurries of success. Fullan (2001) also pointed out that when it came to the actions of governments and senior system decision makers "pluralistic motivations abound" (p. 20). Factors like career enhancement, the satisfaction and simplicity of measurable, visible outcomes, personal gratification, and the need for support from the voting public could all drive decisions that may not be clearly directed towards the real needs of all students.

Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) asked for a deeper understanding of the history and sustainability of educational change, while at the same time being critical of political influences. The problem, as they saw it, was that policy makers were too often focussed on a "driving ambition for political success" (p. 35) and during change planning this can lessen the importance of the critical issue of reform sustainability.

Their argument is that educational reform will generally not be successful without change strategies that are formed while keeping in mind the history and politics of previous change efforts, and their paper points to the significant amount of learning available from these two standpoints. They believe that the ever increasing standardisation of education systems, from teaching approaches to curriculum, and from professional learning requirements to accountability processes, are in practice the "enemy" of sustainable reform and innovation.

Bentley (2008) set out an approach facilitating innovation through new practices and specific models and methods of organisation that he saw as being built upon the actions of the smaller scale parts of a system. This would lead to a continuous process of innovation and adjustment within the organisation and its "teams". He claimed that his model was not just a typical "bottom up" model for change. This supported the notion that local actions matter more than other factors and, furthermore, that local actions towards innovation can have a much broader effect than just generating an improvement within a specific context. Concomitant with this, Bentley (2008) argued that without fundamental reform and innovation and educational "productivity" gains, current schooling systems would increasingly become inadequate to fulfil the needs of 21st century students. Castells (2009) positioned such notions within global economic change, and posited that most nation states are not achieving the required productivity gains. The issue of "productivity" in the education of children is a vexed one and leads logically to questions about the moral dimensions of educational leadership.

Regarding the purposes and moral dimensions around leading a school, Moos et al. (2011) noted:

There is a broad understanding amongst principals in the case stories that the core purpose of schooling is to give a holistic, comprehensive education focused

on education for citizenship and education for democratic citizenship, to mention only two different terms for the endeavour. (p. 220)

Mayo (2012) provided a background for thinking about the moral dimensions of school leadership, about the positioning of the educational enterprise in its society. He drew on the original writings and legacies of both Freire and Milani. He said they both believed in a world "not as it is now but as it can and should be" (p. 83). Mayo explained:

> While Freire has stated time and time again that we should not romanticise education and accord it powers that it does not have, he still believed in agency and in the power of education to serve a democratic and liberating purpose. (p. 86)

Mayo said that what we need to learn from scholars like these was that decisions had to be made by people who could make a difference and that "it involves taking sides" (p. 83). Relating to the current study, from a principal's point of view, what is the primary purpose of their efforts? At what point does the pursuit of more efficient use of human and material resources (productivity gains) clash with the complex, individual needs of the children that they are responsible for educating?

SBM and System Reform

Dimmock (2013) provided a working definition of SBM that has proved useful for this study:

> In essence, the aim is to devolve more powers and decentralise responsibilities to the school level. While more decision making in the allocation of resources used by the school is transferred to the school level, school based personnel are

generally held accountable for their performance and for student outcomes

achieved (p. 13)

What is not specified in this definition that became apparent from this study's data was

the importance of principal control over some aspects of the staffing of their schools.

Notwithstanding this omission, Dimmock's definition proved apposite and implies that

SBM invites cultural change, extending past the school. Difficulties arise in pursuing

the literature because sometimes the term autonomy is used, sometimes devolution,

sometimes "the self-managing" school, etc. I have been cognizant of these

nomenclature variations in working with relevant literature and in the writing of this

thesis.

The topic of school-based management and system reform has been extensively

discussed in many countries by many authors, and there is an inherent tension in these

discussions. On the one hand, proponents of standards and the strengthening of

accountability processes in schools claim there can be gains in student outcomes due to

such system interventions. On the other hand, some authors claim there can be gains for

students because increases in autonomy allow schools to be locally managed more

successfully and by knowing their context, principals can fashion reform and innovation

to suit. It is not as simple however as an "either-or" proposition.

The issues concerning SBM and school autonomy are complex and multifaceted

(Altrichter et al., 2014; Hanushek et al., 2013; Smyth, 2011). For example, Hanushek et

al. (2013) drew on extensive research across many states and countries to show that the

socio-economic level of the country, state, and/or schooling area can have a great

impact on the success or otherwise of increased autonomy. Altrichter et al.'s (2014)

research supported the view that increased autonomy can generate increased school

competitiveness, differentiation, and hierarchisation; yet it also causes management

complexity with the risk that school leaders find themselves trying to operate within a "new unclarity" because revised "old" system-control approaches for schools and new local processes generate a hybrid, one that is at best unwieldy and at worst defeats progress. Smyth (2011) posited that moves towards greater autonomy, or more precisely towards self-managed schools, was no less than a determined, ideologically based destruction of public education systems. It was however disguised as pursuing better outcomes and providing choice when in reality it was a "carefully contrived process of burden-shifting" (p. 99), because in tough economic times, nation states could not continue to bear the costs of public education.

Opposing such views, some researchers contend that SBM can lead to innovation or at least act as an enabling factor for innovation. Caldwell (2004) reported that the relatively high degree of discretion available to (Victorian) principals under decentralised arrangements had assisted in the schools' quests to be more innovative but cautioned that it did not necessarily ensure that innovation would occur. Furthermore, he noted that "the capacity for self-management in schools that has evolved over three decades should be sustained and extended to help achieve the flexibility that is associated with a climate of innovation" (p. 96). The Australian Government's Productivity Commission (2012) report indicated that while it appeared that increased local decision making could increase student learning outcomes, there were a number of caveats that needed to be applied and different states were approaching the matter in a variety of ways. This report discussed the NSW SBM pilot (2009–2011), the forerunner to the current NSW Local Schools, Local Decisions policy, and concluded that:

> There are significant cultural and organisational challenges to implementing
> greater school autonomy in New South Wales. These include concerns among
> the NSW Teachers Federation and some principals, a highly regulated staffing

system, complex budget systems, and the likely difficulty of initiating change in such a large system. (p. 244)

Generally, arguments against SBM take the view that there may be inappropriate decisions made at the local level for any number of reasons, and that a lack of standardisation, accountability, and focus can lead to lowered student outcomes. Supporters of SBM claim that the overregulation often found in systems with little autonomy can generate excessively constrained, even myopic, leadership that is ineffective at using resources to the best possible extent. In terms of the various arguments explicated in the literature, perhaps the view could be put that SBM *may* be effective in some circumstances.

An interesting view was put forward by Gobby (2013). Using a Foucauldian theoretical basis (notions of power, government, and subject) to examine aspects of Western Australia's Independent Public Schools (IPS) program, Gobby (2013) posited that SBM was a form of neo-educational governance working through the local level. Broadly speaking, Gobby (2013) took the view that the change from central to local oversight, at least in terms of power relations, really left schools in the same governance position before any change happened.

Fink and Brayman (2006) resonate with the views of Eacott (2011) that principals are channelled because their contemporary roles position them as mouthpieces of a managerially inclined state. As they put it:

> The increasing erosion of leaders' and teachers' autonomy has forced more and more principals to use "instrumental" and managerial tactics to achieve the short-term shifts that comply with standardized reform. As our data suggest, leaders who empower others need considerable autonomy and time to work with their school communities to establish and achieve meaningful school

improvement goals. When governments mandate standardized and micro-managed reforms that pre-empt most school-based direction setting, they reduce school leaders … to mere functionaries. (p. 86)

Fullan (2014) moved the debate from principals' current roles and their ability to manage locally to considerations about their capacity to lead such that they understood their environment's complexities and to eschew the imposed narrowness of many system reforms. He referred to "a current narrowness … affording the principal greater autonomy in exchange for high stakes accountability" (p. 11) and sought to "cancel that dysfunctional tug of war" by locating "a substantially more powerful lead learner role for principals" (p. 12). He believed that the processes of leadership that he was espousing would transcend the imposed narrowness, but that this would require highly sophisticated leadership. Fullan (2014) also believed that autonomy was not the best pathway to achieve that improved leadership:

> Another false step that is appealing on the surface is to strip away the constraints of bureaucracy by giving the school principal more autonomy in exchange for delivered accountability. Thus principals can be given more discretion over hiring staff and more flexibility with respect to budget and resources. New York City used this model, as have certain states in Australia recently. In these cases, individual schools are granted greater autonomy, but are expected to deliver strong accountability through teacher appraisal and student test results. This deal with the devil has several problems. First, not many schools have the capacity in the first place, so they could hardly do better if left on their own. Second, those that are most advantaged often are the first to respond, creating an even greater gap between the haves and the have-nots. Third, it's not that good a deal anyway. It puts everyone constantly on guard and makes it impossible for

isolated successes to play any part in promoting a larger, more lasting solution. Thus, individual autonomy of schools is no more of a solution than individual autonomy of teachers. (p. 42)

Inter alia, this study's participants allow a deep dive into the problems with autonomy raised by Fullan but, as the results reported in subsequent chapters demonstrate, they do not necessarily concur with all of his views, reflecting the real-world complexity of such issues.

Smyth (2011) wrote that one reason often given for increases in school autonomy was that governments were exiting responsibility for public education. Smyth (2011) disagreed with this notion and said:

That has turned out to not be the case, largely because government did not actually disappear—rather it retreated into an even more powerful role of "policy" setting—steering at a distance, while increasing control through a range of outcomes-driven performance indicators. (p. 112)

Smyth here points to an illusionary form of autonomy where increases in autonomy are undercut by distance control mechanisms embedded in system policy and implementation.

Autonomy, Accountability, and Standards

Accountability, autonomy, and choice are the watchwords of contemporary education reformers around the globe. Concerned with the efficiency of the educational process, many countries have implemented policies in each of these areas in the hopes of advancing the learning of all students in the system. (Schütz, West, & Wöbmann, 2007, p. 8)

System-determined, mandated accountability mechanisms can generate difficulties for principals trying to obtain best possible outcomes from local school operations. Henman and Gable (2015) highlighted the pressures school personnel experience from the use of performance data, and how this could impact on the quality of schooling provision. They said that often bureaucratically designed performance management approaches really only provide a thin but visible cover, a sleight of hand, that did not lead to genuine and useful accountability approaches capable of generating improved student learning outcomes.

Lewis (2015) also discussed the invasive nature of the politics of performance measurement and the assumptions, paradoxes, problems, and consequences that underpin this form of monitoring. She saw accountability measures as a very significant influence on schooling. Lewis (2015) claimed that the performance of public institutions had remained a measurement problem since the 1970s. She pointed out that public sector managers rarely got to choose the forms of accountability that were applied to them. The choice of accountability processes actually lends political power to those that make the decision, and she viewed public-sector bureaucracies as instruments of "coercion and redistribution" (p. 4). Furthermore, she believed that the policy goals of any particular accountability program needed to be clear for its measurements to mean anything at the point of service delivery, and posited that this was rarely the case. She added that the managers of service delivery sites often disputed whether a particular program was useful. As we will see, data collected by this research supports this view.

Even if a principal agreed with the direction and measurement approaches of a particular accountability program, Williams and Johnson (2013) took the position that school leaders are not always effective in communicating this information to their staff. In their study, this became a problem for strategic leadership and planning at the school

level. Their research was based on a survey of 20 candidates in school administration

positions, people who were school leaders but not necessarily principals. While the

matters raised in their paper are mainly about planning and shared vision development,

they do provide a view that flexibility will always be required to adapt to change and

the turbulence that often accompanies change. However, flexibility in public sector

accountability processes are rare.

> At this stage in history, this tradition [of holistic, democratically focused
>
> comprehensive education]is being met with a general trend towards more
>
> emphasis on detailed standards for student achievements in some basic subjects
>
> and a strict testing and examination system. The trend has been shown to have
>
> an impact on the ways schools are managed and led. (Moos et al., 2011, p. 220)

Olssen et al. (2004) posited that improving accountability and monitoring of

schools, along with the neoliberal view that increasing competition would increase

efficiency, required the introduction of managerialism that "erode[s] relations of trust

and social capital in the social system as a whole" (p. 190). Importantly for the current

study, Olssen et al. also pointed out that trust is "a cumulative feature of any institution

or social organisation" (p. 193). He adds that a truism of human relationships is that

distrust builds more distrust but that trust can build more trust. The issue of trust, and of

problems of "us and them," were among the major concepts raised by all participants in

my study. On the matter of trust, Codd (2005) stated that:

> in the pursuit of greater accountability, government policies have produced
>
> systems of managerial surveillance and control that have fostered within schools
>
> and other educational institutions a culture in which trust is no longer taken to be
>
> the foundation of professional ethics. (p. 202)

"Right" and "Wrong" Drivers

Fullan, Hargreaves, Quinn and others (Fullan, 2003, 2011); Fullan & Quinn, 2016, Hargreaves et al., 2009 and Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) have discussed the importance of change drivers particularly as they apply to whole system rather than individual school reform. Fullan (2011) drew a strong distinction between those drivers of system change that will assist reform (right drivers) and those that will not (wrong drivers). Insightfully, he noted that the wrong drivers were not always wrong, it was just that too many systems *lead* with the wrong drivers encountering sub-optimal and counterproductive outcomes, as principals react to the pressures these drivers engender. Fullan identified a set of what he calls the right drivers for change: intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, teamwork, and what he referred to as "allness" (a sense that everyone involved has to be part of the solution). He advocated these right drivers as essential to achieve sustainable whole-system reform (Fullan, 2011, p. 3). In contrast, he described the "wrong" drivers as being "culprits" that stifled change in school systems, including:

1.   accountability: using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools vs capacity building;

2.   individual teacher and leadership quality: promoting individual vs group solutions;

3.   technology: investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs instruction; and,

4.   fragmented strategies vs integrated or systemic strategies. (p. 5)

In 2016, Fullan and Quinn turned their attention to the *implementation* of change drivers noting that identifying the right and wrong drivers was not enough. The import

of this text was that even balancing the right and wrong drivers in an appropriately designed system reform program may not yield significant change. As they proceeded, the change drivers had to be actioned by people with a positive mindset who were focused on learning, changing, and improving the reforms. It required cultivating collaborative cultures across the system, and was about deepening pedagogical learning; this, in turn, needed the establishment of systems of appropriate accountability that could build the capacity of teachers for self-responsibility.

Underpinning Fullan and Quinn's views about the right drivers for action was the importance of relationships. McAlister and Catone (2013, p. 31) posited that the process of building relationships increased the prospects of lasting school improvement. That is, sustainable reforms will require attention to relationships at a number of levels. In his chapter headed "Relationships, Relationships, Relationships," Fullan (2001) provided examples as to why it is difficult to get anywhere with educational change without sound, effective relationships. That is, people are crucial to change, individual voices are important, so this research focuses on individual principals and their local and broader professional relationships.

The issue of purpose—broadly moral purpose but more specifically local, educational purpose—was a matter raised in the literature. Indeed, what drives and motivates school leaders could be considered as one of the central tenets of some views on school reform agendas. Biesta (2009) contended that more research and policy effort was needed on the purposes of education because they were crucial, not just in obtaining thoughtful direction, but also in understanding issues relating to change.

Principals' Roles and Effectiveness

Almost four decades ago, Edmonds (1982) expounded the "correlates of effective schooling": quality of principal leadership, maintaining a strong instructional focus, building a constructive climate for teaching and learning, communicating high teacher expectations of student achievement, and effective measurement of outcomes that can support evaluation efforts. These factors still resonate in the Grattan Institute's recent paper on *Turning Schools Around* (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014), which emphasised that what worked to obtain reform was remarkably similar and consistent across schools and leaders. They remarked that again and again, schools were seen to "follow the same steps to bring about change" (p. 6) but emphasised that specific context and personal characteristics of school leaders must always come into play.

Day et al. (2011) offered a similar view about the common steps required for bringing about change but pointed to the importance of context. They said that while contextually relevant research can provide information about the impact of the surrounding environment, these studies had limitations. They were either based on the "antecedents" of leadership, where the studies had principals taking actions because they were cognisant of their particular circumstances, or contextual research that saw context as a moderator of a leader's effect on their organisation. They concluded their paper by noting, "so what is contingent about leadership is not the basic or core practices, but the way they are enacted. It is the enactment that must be sensitive to context, not the core practices themselves" (p. 31).

More recently, Brady (2014) discussed the broad imperatives required if school improvement was to be successful, and provided a list of the directions (below) that could facilitate improvement for students. As frequently happens in the literature, there

were strong connections to Edmond's (1982) correlates, albeit using current norms of language:

- adopt a student-centred orientation

- emphasise teaching and learning

- promote distributed leadership

- monitor student learning

- develop skills for promoting change

- connect with community

- embed professional learning

- sustain improvement (p. 4)

Furthermore, Brady (2014) strongly supported Fullan's (2001) view that change processes need to be carefully thought through. This is primarily because they can cause friction and should be based on suitable, coherent system engagements with school change. A more gradual approach to obtaining the quality outcomes that systems and governments required was the best way forward, not least of all due to the complex challenges indicated by the above list (and Edmonds' [1982] original correlates).

Eacott (2011), emphasised the saliency of intrinsic motivation amongst the key drivers for sustainable change and saw the current approaches to principal preparation as an unhelpful form of public sector "managerialist intervention" (p. 45).

Leadership

Aspects of personal character and prevailing culture, branching into concepts of leadership "goodness" (Lightfoot, 1983) and the moral purpose of leadership (Biesta, 2009), are seen to have a crucial place in any model of leadership practice. Indeed, the

complex nature of peoples' value structures is of high importance when trying to understand decision-making behaviour (Connor & Becker, 2003).

All these elements form key parts of the context that school leaders both affect and are affected by. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) commented:

> Informed by previous scholarship, we argue that in order to understand leadership practice, leaders' thinking and behaviour as well as their situation need to be considered together, in an integrated framework, for a thoroughgoing consideration of leadership practice. (p. 10)

Day et al. (1999) posited that it was context, the nature of the tensions and issues that mattered locally, that led to the leadership approaches adopted by school leaders rather than their ongoing use of a particular leadership style. Going further, he said that the use of leadership theories to explain particular approaches was unlikely to greatly assist understandings about leadership and context because of the extraordinary complexity of a school's operation. There was no implication that leadership was not fundamentally important for a successful, innovative school. Whilst Spillane et al. (2004) claimed that "leadership is thought to be critical to innovation in schools" (p. 3), international approaches to how school leadership is conceptualised, and those aspects that are emphasised in practice, vary greatly (Townsend, 2011).

Leana (2011) studied how a group of American principals actually pursued their workday:

> We found that principals, like most managers, multitask in their jobs and also do a significant amount of unplanned work each day. On average, principals recorded more than 60 distinct tasks in a five-day workweek. As expected, they spent the largest portion of their time—an average of fifty seven percent or twenty eight hours per week—on administrative matters like facility

management and paperwork. They spent a far smaller portion of their time—twenty five percent on average—on instructional activities like mentoring and monitoring teachers. Still less of their time—fourteen percent on average—was spent on external relations like meeting with parents, developing community relations, going to community meetings and interacting with outsiders, such as foundations and publishers, to enhance the school's resources. But it is these latter class of activities which can be conceived of as building external social capital that made the difference both for teachers and for students (p. 35).

There are various terms used to describe styles of leadership. These terms include instructional, distributed, transactional, transformational, and strategic, among others (Larsen & Reickhoff, 2014; Sinnema, Ludlow, & Robinson, 2016; Spillane et al., 2004; Story, 2004; Van Oord, 2013).

Given that my study is about the development of innovation at the school level it became important to understand how a principal might go about moving their school towards an ethos that favoured innovation. Perhaps the most applicable leadership style to consider in these circumstances is that which is often called *transformational* leadership. Bass and Riggio (2006) define transformational leaders as "those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity" (p. 3). Leithwood, Jantzi, and Fernandez (1994) pointed to the strong relationship between transformational leadership and teachers' commitment to improvements in instructional practice. In Australia, Holmes et al. (2013) provided some case study evidence based on what two principals said about obtaining and sustaining change in five areas of action that they identified as important for transformational leadership. This generally focused on the achievement of goals, and the principals' processes to achieve these goals, but not so much about the

underlying but vitally important forces and structures that drive or impede innovation. Balyer (2012) put forward a broader view that developing the organisation's capacity to innovate must involve some form of transformational leadership. Balyer believed that transformational leadership challenges the potentially bureaucratic nature of a school's operation and that it enables a school to become "its own transforming agent" (p. 582). Another view is that transformational leadership may be seen as distributed leadership, in that it focuses on developing "a shared vision and shared commitment to school change" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). Marks and Printy (2003) provided a note of caution in considering the relative importance of transformational leadership, succinctly noting in the abstract of their paper that was based on a study of 24 "restructured" schools (schools that were successfully achieving reform in the United States), that:

> The study finds that transformational leadership is a necessary but insufficient condition for instructional leadership. When transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist in an integrated form of leadership, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial (p. 370).

> Continuing they noted that "the [transformational] model lacks an explicit focus on teaching and learning." (p. 377).

Transformational leadership is very much about change, about leading from the front by understanding the importance of relationships, of purpose, and of innovation rather than great reliance on process. In this sense, it is an inspirational version of the broader category of distributed leadership but it may need to work in concert with other forms of leadership. Adams, Olsen, and Ware (2017) provided detail about how principals might go about nurturing the learning capacities of their students; "[S]chool principals who interacted with teachers about student psychological needs and need-

supporting instructional practices contributed to a learning environment that students experienced as autonomy-supporting and competence-supporting" (p. 576).

Larsen and Rieckhoff (2014) undertook a research effort that focussed on practicing schools undertaking distributed leadership and found that "as principals understand ways they can share leadership with others, they begin to recognize how this connects with their own development as leaders, and how such distributed leadership plays a role in bringing about school change" (p. 305).

After undertaking extensive research, Drescher, Korsgaard, Welpe, Picot, and Wigand (2014) pointed to the many actions and structures that could be undertaken by leaders for which we might use the term "shared leadership." They claimed that a subset of this type of leadership was "empowering leadership". This phenomenon provided a useful construct for thinking about how this study's participating principals and their system interacted. This was because empowered leaders could "give members control over their own tasks and build their confidence" (p. 773). Importantly, Drescher et al. (2014) demonstrated that they realised that there was an ongoing dynamic regarding any leadership construct, and that this dynamic could influence reform and improvement. They argued that it was necessary to understand more about the following premise:

> Although theory and research have neglected to address the consequences of shared leadership in a dynamic sense, insights from the literature suggest that increases in shared leadership have motivational implications for the group that should lead to performance improvements. (p. 773)

Regardless of the terms used, as Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) noted, "the leadership agenda is the change agenda" (p. 95). They commented that leadership development approaches have to work in synchronisation with the reform approaches that are being

undertaken by systems. Fullan has expressed very similar views on this matter (for example, Fullan, (2001).

The current study focused on SBM, principal perceptions, and system responses, and the issues associated with these matters might be better described as issues of "devolved leadership" rather than potentially broad descriptions such as distributed leadership. My study was not about transformative, distributed, shared, or empowered leadership per se. It was not about mechanisms by which principals lead their staff by empowering teachers with increased responsibility, but rather about principals' perceptions of their leadership within a *system* of education, a level of leadership interaction that operated above what the principals may have been doing to distribute leadership within their schools. That is not to say that they did not see leading and sharing the leadership with their teachers as unimportant.

Youngs (2014) suggested that the emergence of detailed case studies in education has caused the idea of distributed leadership to become inadequate as a conceptualisation of the operational practice of schools, because the term "distributed leadership" is essentially too shallow. The day-to-day realities of leadership are complex, entailing matters of influence and deference and "configurations shaped by differing degrees of capital and role-based authority" (p. 1). Youngs (2014) goes further, positing that studies of practice that are labelled as being about distributed leadership must really encompass socio-cultural-political analysis. From his research, he developed an analytical framework (Figure 2 below) that he suggested could be used as a lens to reveal what was "behind" leadership practices.

The diagram shows four nested ovals with four levels:

Historical educative, social, cultural and political contexts	4th Level
Current educative, social, cultural and political contexts	3rd Level
Emergent forms of leadership	2nd Level
Organisational forms of leadership	1st Level

Sociological and critical analysis

Hybrid configurations of leadership
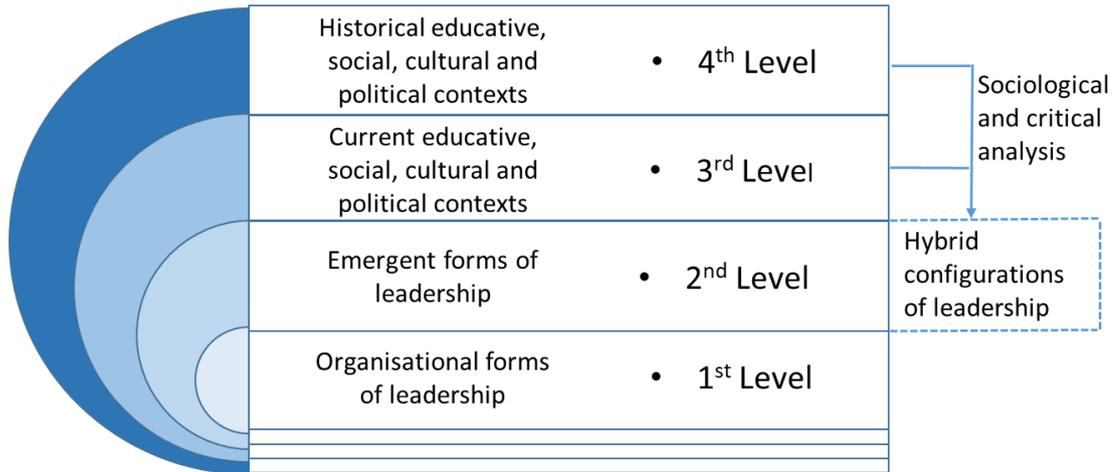
Figure 2. Youngs' analytical framework diagram. Adapted from "Problematising Day-to-Day Practice through Sociological Case Study Design: Speaking Back to the Oversimplification of Educational Distributed Leadership Research and Commentary" by H. Youngs, 2014. Reprinted with permission.

Distributed leadership: First, second, third and fourth levels of Young's analytical framework. Youngs' work on the oversimplification of distributed leadership provides a realistic lens for viewing what the participants say about distributed leadership and SBM, backgrounding thinking about my own data. It identifies the multi-level forces and nuances active across the dimensions of leadership. In the data gathered for the current study, elements of these four leadership aspects can be seen in the perceptions offered by participants, in particular, current educative, social, cultural, and political contexts. Youngs noted that "the strength of the framework lies in its versatility across any educative, social, cultural and political contexts where hybrid configurations of leadership practice could exist in a school" (p. 18).

Given the saliency ascribed to leadership matters in the contemporary literature, there is surprisingly little research on principals' perceptions of drivers and impediments to change. Three international studies involving principal perceptions have been identified, and these provided some insights for the current study. The first by

Gunbayi (2011) undertook a detailed study of principals in Turkey where he used metaphors to elicit the perceptions of what was important to principals in carrying out their roles. Metaphors that were used included principals as leaders of a football team, as bee keepers, and as robots. In these case studies, principals of the highly centralised Turkish system discussed pressures for change from both inside and outside their schools. These pressures may be easily recognisable to many Australian principals. For example, one participant used the metaphor of "the beaten boxer." The over-riding theme that the Turkish principals offered was one of pressure, notably pressures of a kind that the principals found hard to alleviate.

The second was an American study of 349 principals by Urick and Bowers (2011) that identified a link between the academic climate and principals' perceptions of their own influence, self-evaluation, and relationships. Prior to this date, little attention had been given in the literature to a principal's *perception* of their responsibilities and (in this case) how it related to their view of the academic climate (Urick & Bowers, 2011). The Urick and Bowers study pointed to the importance of principal leadership to influencing academic climate and student outcomes. It also noted that relatively little is known about principals' perceptions of their position, in terms of how this relates to successful school conditions.

The third was a study in Pakistan by Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, and Quraishi (2014) which pointed towards the "dire need to explore the perceptions of principals' about their own leadership behaviour towards its effect on students' academic achievement" (p. 2). This research focussed on the behaviour of secondary school leaders and their impact on the academic achievement of 10th grade students in both public and private schools. The study found that while principals' leadership behaviour did have an effect on students' academic outcomes, there was a significant contrast between the point of

view of the leaders and those observing them in terms of this effect. It must be noted that the current study does not involve the views of those observing the principals involved, but it would be perhaps a valuable future research pathway.

According to Hallinger et al. (1992), perceptions are intimately related to beliefs. In a study of the perceptions of 15 American principals they found:

> Aside from the predictable impediments to reform represented by entrenched bureaucracies, resistant organizational cultures, and competing political interests, this study highlighted the potentially crucial role played by the belief systems of those professionals charged with implementing educational reform. (p. 37)

These ideas point to the relationship between change processes and individual leadership positions, contexts, and leader characteristics. These matters feature strongly in the current study.

Caldwell (2004) discussed the transformation of schools as a "new paradigm" that questions traditional views which he regarded as "site bound." Principals' value imperatives, such as their personal views of society, concepts of morality, and purposes in education, and their own political persuasions must colour how they interpret their roles and try to meet the expectations placed upon them. As seen in Table 1 below, Caldwell (2004) set out "a blueprint for leadership" that he believed was important in terms of the directions leadership development should take in the context of "self-managing" schools. Even though the NSW system shows little sign of trying to build a system of "self-managing" schools, in terms of the current study, much of this material proved useful to background the participants' perceptions. Indeed, if all the participant interviews are considered, then all the components and elements of this table appear in the data and on multiple occasions.

Table 1

A Blueprint for Leadership

Components	Elements
Vision	1. Global consensus on expectations for schools
Tracks for change	1. Building systems of self-managing schools
	2. Unrelenting focus on learning outcomes
	3. Creating schools for the knowledge society
Values defining the public good	1. Access
	2. Equity
	3. Choice
	4. Growth
	5. Efficacy
	6. Harmony
Dimensions of leadership	1. Strategic
	2. Educational
	3. Responsive
	4. Cultural
Domains of innovation	1. School design
	2. Boundary spanning
	3. Curriculum
	4. Pedagogy
	5. Professionalism
Integrating themes	1. Knowledge management
	2. Abandonment

Note. Adapted from "A Strategic View of Efforts to Lead the Transformation of Schools" by B. Caldwell, 2004, *School Leadership and Management, 24*, p. 92. Copyright 2004 by Taylor and Francis.

Caldwell's notes supporting the table explain how the components interact with his blueprint for leadership. *Vision* is about the global transformation of schooling including expectations of learning and teaching; *tracks* refers to broad matters of educational change; *values* are about support for public education; *dimensions* of leadership covers cultural and strategic matters; *innovation* elements concern the common areas of school innovation and *integrating themes* relates to leadership capacities required for achieving a vision for global schooling transformation. Caldwell

(2004) sees the impact of this table as far reaching and posits that it is really about "the transformation of schools for the 21st century" (p. 94).

Context, Climate, and Culture

A positive, effective culture is a vital component of successful schools and in understanding and developing culture, context cannot be ignored. In their study, MacNeil et al. (2009) noted "testimony from successful school principals suggested that focusing on the development of the school's culture as a learning environment is fundamental to improved teacher morale and student achievement" (p. 74). Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) believed it was a necessary factor in "turning schools around," in order for schools to achieve improved student outcomes.

Day et al. (2011) posited that because school leaders operate in such a complex and fast-paced operational environment, successful leadership often relies on selecting the features that matter from among the vast number of contextual issues, including issues from external policy drivers to internal instructional practice and much in between. He viewed this as "context intensity" and referred to a number of theories about leadership effectiveness that demonstrate the critical nature of context (p. 4). In trying to understand the effects of context, it becomes apparent that there are elements that involve a broader perspective than just the singular actions of a leader. Kimmelman (2010) suggested that leaders seeking innovation need to take into account "what people know, do and care about in order to understand what the context for the challenge (attempting innovation) might be" (2010, p. 79). (Lord & Maher, 2002) believed that leaders were driven by both internal and external contexts. This theory held that leadership was attributed to a particular individual by the people who choose to follow them. The leader's perceptions matter greatly in this theory, and these perceptions are

partly driven by "internal contexts," personal understandings, and values. It might be said that the leader's authority is granted by those being led.

Fullan (2000b) drew an important distinction between the processes of restructuring and reculturing while also pointing to the difficulty (and importance) of the latter. While restructuring seems common at a system level, and refers to changes in the formal structures between an organisation's "formal elements" such as personnel roles, reculturing requires deeper transformation based on "social capital," or simplistically put, the building of positive relationships that support a school's work (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Hargreaves and Fullan defined their term "professional capital" as the intersection of social, decisional (quality decisions), and human capital (what individuals can do), with the latter referring to the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills (p. 3). Decisional capital was likened to the acts and capacities of a judge at law, but social capital is more complex because it is about the interactions of people both within and outside the teaching profession. They defined social capital as follows:

> The quality and quantity of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same norms or codes of behaviour. (p. 90)

They suggest that social capital development can improve decisional capital, such that "high-yield" strategies are developed and improved upon, until this becomes the norm and an improved culture can develop. They commented that of the three elements of professional capital, it is social capital that is most important in terms of underpinning the development of a professional culture for a school or education community.

Professional cultures and networks can connect schools but to be effective all parts of the organisation need to be "on the same page."

Coherence

The Collins Australian English Dictionary defines coherence as "being logically connected or consistent." Gamage (2009) argued that "when a [school level] policy is established, usually, it is based on a set of beliefs, values and an educational philosophy on the issue concerned" (p. 112). He called for school leaders to take a hard look at both internal and external environments as they set about developing goals and policies for the future, and commented that this requires the careful consideration of data. As Gamage (2009) explained, the issue here was that to develop school goals and policies, school leaders must consider both internal and external environments. Yet what he did not canvass was the notion of how those environments and particular approaches to school leadership might intersect and interact and that is a dynamic at the heart of this research.

In a qualitative research paper about data-driven decision making across four American school systems and districts, Wohlstetter, Datnow, and Park (2008) discussed in depth the concept of "principal–agent". In this case, the principal was not necessarily the principal of the school but rather a person or entity who could direct or at least strongly influence the agent (p. 241). Using a NSW example, the principal may be the Public Schools Director and the agent would then be the principal of one of his or her area's (district) schools. Wohlstetter et al. (2008) detailed a number of problems that may arise because of principal–agent relationships.

At the heart of principal-agent theory is a contract specifying decision rights— what the agent should do and what the principal must do in return—and with

this relationship come built-in control problems. In effect, the theory makes two

assumptions: that goal conflict exists between principal and agent and that the

agent has more information than the principal, which results in information

asymmetry between them. (p. 241)

Essentially, Wohlstetter et al. (2008) saw the principal's role as that of

empowering the agent such that the agent acted as if they *were* the principal. The

Wohlstetter study saw this issue as a matter of alignment: alignment of curriculum,

assessment processes, common cultures of data use, and careful approaches to the levels

of the agent's local control (subsidiarity). It is the latter that is of significant importance

to the current study because empowerment affects flexibility, and school leaders must

have sufficient local autonomy to act on local needs in the light of the data that is

available. Finally, Wohlstetter et al. (2008) pointed to the sophistication needed in

education systems so that reform and accountability work together across all levels:

schools, districts, and systems.

The importance of coherence in education systems' approaches to reform was

put forward in many of the writings of Fullan. Indeed, Fullan and Quinn (2016) posited

that without a coherent approach to reform, improvement efforts were unlikely to

succeed. Fullan (2000b) noted that the problem was not that there were no reforms

underway, but rather that that there were too many simultaneous change efforts across

many systems, and that these were too often supported by ad hoc policy and ill-thought-

out attempts at innovation. He echoed the Wohlstetter et al. (2008) study about the

value of alignment (how the elements of a system should fit together) but added detail

about connections, specifically the effective connection of people and information

across a system, because then there would be an understanding of common purpose.

However, Fullan and Quinn (2016) did not see alignment and coherence as the same thing. While with effort there might be alignment of purpose, coherence for the whole organisation was a much broader, important but likely difficult task. They stated that "coherence pertains to people individually and especially collectively; coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work" (p. 1). While the combined efforts of a system, including its districts and schools, are all important in a coherent framework it is perhaps the district where Fullan best clarifies roles across the levels. He framed successful districts as fulfilling "go between" roles that are more about relationships and capacity building than compliance and supervision (Fullan, 2001, 2010; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). It is not about a "strong line of authority" in Fullan's view; rather, the issue is more about leading schools towards purposeful peer interactions and learnings.

Fullan (2010) in considering a study about successful school leadership by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) pointed to four crucial activities of high performing districts: core processes, supporting conditions, relationships, and leadership. As previously noted, the issue of relationships is important because he saw great value in collaborative practice that not only spanned the local district or area, but also worked beyond it. This encompassed a broad span of educational effort to be engaged by both the state and the system, and also by individual schools not necessarily within the local district.

As a strong advocate of coherence, Fullan (2000a) believed that system policy and local energies should support each other and he identified a vital role for the school. His view was that teachers and principals must not see all their efforts as implementing someone else's program. This concept proved very important for the current study. Fullan's position was that schools, principals, and teachers needed to build their local

capacity for change because "it strengthens the ability of schools to define the reform agenda" (p. 25).

On the more general matter of authority, Hatcher (2005) argued that:

[T]here is an inevitable contradiction in schools between "authority" and "influence," between the benefits claimed for distributed leadership and the constraints imposed by hierarchical management with the headteacher at the top. An authentically participative professional culture cannot be achieved within existing government-driven management structures. (p. 261)

Hatcher identifies here an important issue—that mandated hierarchical structures are likely to negatively impact innovative practice.

Concerns about the extent of local control loom large in the underlying issues of any study that relates real-world matters to SBM. Authority can provide increased control over staffing and resources, but the use of local power for a given level of resourcing, and the purposes for which these resources are used, can be important. It complicates any discussion about coherence as purpose enters the discourse; for example, how resources might be focussed to particular groups of students or tasks and why that focus was chosen.

Even though it was written over 45 years ago, Wise (1971) provided commentary that was useful for the current study. The paper engaged with the level of responsibility of the State to either provide minimal educational funding (considered as standardised input), or alternatively to consider equality of educational opportunity as a right, that is, to finance around need. In other words, to consider output as part of the funding equation. The paper's conclusion favoured the latter, but in canvassing the issues around resource use it goes to the heart of the extent to which SBM can assist in obtaining better and fairer student outcomes. In reality, SBM is affected by the level of

funding available, how the system and its districts apportion that funding, as well as many other practical factors, for example, the extent of genuine *local* human resource and curriculum control. In the current study, these matters are important for understanding more about the perceptions of the principal participants and their views about how their efforts align with the system they inhabit.

Another concern related to obtaining the best outcomes for schools and students is the matter of teacher quality. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) highlighted the need for quality in the teaching profession if peer interactions are going to yield tangible results. Similarly, they saw effective, professionally focussed peer interactions as being important and, of course, as a positive outcome of the effort to build and sustain relationships. The danger they identified was that without professional "quality teachers," it was too easy to share ignorance rather than build capacity.

Fullan and Watson (2000) supported the view that for schools to reach excellence, they were likely to be working in a situation where there were loose centralised controls and a majority of skilled educators. They posited that teachers working with their peers to develop innovation and creativity within their own schools was the best way to raise performance standards. Where innovation really happened, it was about building the capacity of the staff. The point here is that coherent, collaborative approaches are not just a question of subsidiarity. As Fullan and Quinn (2016) argued, "we are not talking about mere coherence of existing elements but a radical transformation into deep learning with all of its associated parts" (p. 136).

Conclusion

It is difficult decide what to include in a literature review, even when a well-thought-out model assists with organising the material, because in choosing particular

literature under particular headings, thinking is inevitably directed along particular paths. Notwithstanding this difficulty, I have endeavoured to keep this review focussed on directly relevant material, but have also included material that might underpin the deeper nuances that have the potential to make this study of greater practical use.

The following chapter presents the methodology. Upon reading, discussion with supervisors, and reflection, I decided that activity theory would provide the appropriate methodological framework for pursuing research that engaged with the perceptions of practicing principals. It could provide a pragmatic, detailed, suitably broad and academically justifiable approach for exploring the issues raised by participants regarding the drivers and impediments that impacted change, reform, and innovation in their schools. Such impacts were examined with specific reference to SBM. Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) noted that "as with any reform process, the devil is in the detail on how it is done" (p. 19). Mehta (2013) argued that ongoing change creates paradigms, and that there are always forces within society that have the potential to create recurring opportunities for change, that is, to create new paradigms:

> [O]nce these diverse strands are linked together into a powerful master narrative, they can reverberate outwards, creating changes in the politics, policy, institutional control, and substantive direction of entire policy arenas. (p. 316)

A case has already been made that this study was important work because of its capacity to provide detail about principal activities in real-world settings, particularly as the principal participants attempted to build an innovative culture that could benefit their students and their context. It was also important because it helps to unravel the complex, interdependent intersections between some of the political and societal forces that influence the operation of schools and the need for practicing principals to achieve outcomes that are both measureable and suitable for their particular situation. It was

timely because of the increasing policy focus on SBM in the jurisdiction where the

schools were located.

Chapter 3

Methodology

[W]e still know little about how to improve our research studies in terms of contributing to the educational practice by reckoning with teachers' main concerns and views, that is, *how* we can include important practicality issues of teachers into our research studies.

Van Velzen (2013, p. 792)

Study Context

This work is set in a group of NSW Government Secondary (High) Schools. The principals that have participated were purposefully chosen to have school contexts that were significantly different. The commonalities of the participants revolved around the following factors—they were all: experienced leaders and managers of secondary schools; working in the NSW Government school system; experiencing significant change at the system, district, and local level; and, attempting significant, often long-term innovation within their schools.

Examining practice at the level of the school leader is beneficial for a deeper understanding of how reform and innovation does or does not happen in schools (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2008; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). Many authors posited that there was a disconnection between local practice and government policy initiatives, such as LSLD (Codd, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Day et al., 1999; Fink & Stoll, 2005; Olssen et al., 2004). One of the aims of this study was to understand whether the system, district, and school levels of education in the NSW public system were working in concert or whether there were operational tensions across these levels. Fullan and Quinn (2016) has continued their strong calls for coherence across all levels of educational systems if they are to achieve sustainable large-scale reform and innovative practice. Perhaps the most cogent of these was Fullan's "tri-level proposition" entailing coherence between the three levels: school and community, district (or region or area), and state (Fullan, 2010).

LSLD, as the focus on SBM in NSW policy terms, could be expected to significantly impact on principals' practices. Does this important state government reform really impact the ways that principals lead? Engaging with this matter, Fullan and Watson (2000) concluded that SBM was related to change in schools because it could alter their capacity, while Williams and Johnson (2013) discussed how important it was that school leaders focus and act upon what their school's needs might be (and take their staff with them on this improvement journey). The Finnish model does not use autonomy policies but instead encourages its schools to incorporate notions of flexible, responsible, and socially coherent school operations (Sahlberg, 2007) and, in terms of enactment, Sahlberg claimed that there are significant complexities associated with the implementation of SBM. An analysis of PISA outcomes in a paper by Schütz et al. (2007) also indicated implementation complexity.

In a broad sense, notions like those of Sahlberg and Schütz et al. bring into focus the issue of school governance. Altrichter et al. (2014) pointed out that in order to understand changes in governance "we must attend to the ways 'policy offers' are translated and appropriated by actors on 'lower' levels of the education system, in particular at the school level" (p. 692). My study was built around a discussion of how SBM and site-based innovations are unfolding, or whether from a principal's perspective there are various reasons why this was not happening.

In a wide-ranging appraisal of school leadership in the 21st century, Townsend (2011) noted that his extensive contemporary reading about leadership matters demonstrated that "the common feature of the articles was that excellent leadership at the local level is central to the task of organising schools, if high levels of student achievement are to be attained" (p. 94). He continued by generalising that:

> As has been shown by most research, the influence of leadership on student outcomes is indirect and consequently something that has to be managed, both internally, by the leader establishing relationships with other stakeholders in the school but also, externally, as education systems try to develop school leaders that can influence student achievement. (p. 100)

Such notions point to the need for principals to engage with aspects of distributed leadership, with what makes a school successful, and with the importance of context, accountability, and how to manage ongoing policy developments. All these practical engagements must be supported in this study's methodology.

My study matters because it was one journey along the path towards obtaining more detail about educational change processes at a time when the rate of principal (and all school workforce) retirement and recruitment was high (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2012). The study was also consistent with the directions that

NSW secondary principals have themselves been pursuing. Over the last 20 years, practicing principals in NSW have become much more engaged in trying to develop better, more innovative approaches for their schools and for public education in general through their professional association: the NSW Secondary Principals Council (NSW SPC). In the landmark paper, *Preferred Futures for Public Secondary Education in NSW*, released in 1999 and updated in 2005, the SPC, ministering to around 95% of secondary and central school principals in NSW, sought to adopt a forward view. The reasoning offered for this extensive project was that "by basing actions today on an analysis of the future which is grounded in the views of experienced practitioners, it should be possible to develop schools and the public school system towards a preferred future" (NSW Secondary Principals Council [NSW SPC], 1999b, p. C-3).

The *Preferred Futures* document marked the end of what might be termed the reactive period of Council's operations where system and Government policy was "handed down" to principals, then examined and reacted to by various sections of the SPC membership. By 1996 this model was proving ineffective. The solution agreed upon by Council was to become proactive through research, extended membership engagement with options for best practice, and by working with the system and the Education Minister of the day on policy, purpose, and overall direction. During the first half of the 2000s decade, many people who had been involved over the three-year period of the *Preferred Futures* development engaged to one extent or another with implementing aspects of it but meaningful change was slow.

My study aimed to contribute to our understanding of the leadership and management of schools through the perceptions of practicing principals. There are positives and negatives associated with qualitative research in education, and the issues that can arise include a researcher's competence, background, and their potential for

bias. Specifically, a researcher's personal background, their belief set, and their

previous experiences in the field of interest will inevitably influence the research

processes chosen, the way data is used and analysed, and the outcomes and

recommendations of a study (Creswell, 2008). While genuine and comprehensive

attempts to address bias have underwritten the development of the research processes

for this study, it is both important and ethical to include an open and honest declaration

of the researcher's background. As such, the last section of this chapter titled

Researcher Background provides this information. I would suggest that my

comprehensive experience in leadership and management in education in NSW have

given me privileged insights into the evidence that was gathered during this study—

insight that an "outsider" may not be able to accomplish. On the other hand, I

acknowledge this gain could also be a potential source of bias and in this chapter I

address this and other research limitations.

Research Design

This study canvassed the in-depth perspectives of eight school leaders. The

focus was on their perceptions of innovation and SBM, delving into understandings of

the person, place, and educational context of their work. Consequently, a qualitative,

multiple case study approach was used (Creswell, 2008; Mears, 2009; Merriam, 1998;

Yin, 2009) to provide an in-depth insight into the issue of the drivers and impediments

to site-based innovation with particular reference to SBM.

I examined the perceptions of eight high school principals as case studies to

illustrate and illuminate a range of views about SBM and innovation in real-world

school settings, settings that inevitably included district- and system-level factors.

Merriam (1998) indicated that case studies offer:

a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of

potential importance in understanding a phenomenon. Anchored in real life

situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon.

It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences.

These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future

research; hence case study plays an important role in advancing a field's

knowledge base. (p. 41)

Merriam (1998) considered a case study to essentially be an "inquiry procedure" that

focusses on meaning and interpretation and, in this case, to arrive at possible ways

forward of "practical significance" to both academic researchers and practicing

principals (Creswell, 2008, p. 13).

Hallinger et al. (1992) undertook a research design that was, in many ways,

similar to that of the current study. They sought to understand major educational

restructuring in the United States (A Nation at Risk) based (inter alia) on 15 principals'

perceptions about the reform. The rationale for their research design was that:

because so little is known about principals' views on restructuring, we decided

that an exploratory study employing qualitative methodology would be most

appropriate. In a similar vein, because our goal was to portray principals' voices,

we used in-depth interviewing. Finally, because our objective was to probe

deeply into principals' perspectives and to develop rich descriptions of their

views on restructuring, we chose a small sample with whom we could work

more intensively. We readily acknowledge the limitations that accompany the

choices made in the methods of conducting the study, particularly those that

accompany the small sample size. (p. 331)

Hallinger et al. used semi-structured interview protocols with their findings, pointing to the "myriad difficulties associated with fundamental reform" (p. 348).

Of particular import for my study was the broad support for the notion that the local school is crucial as a locus for improvement (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Brady, 2014; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). If the school is a locus for improvement, then engaging fully with school circumstances and environments and workplace politics requires a very thoughtful, knowledgeable understanding of the principalship and how schools operate on a day-by-day basis. As Blasé (2005) emphasised, "recognizing and trying to change power relationships, especially in complicated, traditional institutions like schools, is among the most complex tasks human beings can undertake" (p. 264).

Data and Research Standards

The questions used in this study were of the open-ended type and data were gathered using one-on-one interviews. Care was taken to ensure the participants received the questions well before the interviews took place, and during the interview sessions, discussion was encouraged. Mears (2009) discussed the need for a researcher to acknowledge that there are significant challenges to interview-based research. She pointed to the "daunting" nature of this type of data gathering, but was in no way against the value of qualitative, multiple case study research. She noted the need to address concerns like scientific rigour, the ultimate usefulness of findings, and the problems of making sense of a great deal of written, even possibly conflicting data. She noted that for research of this type, "an interview researcher embarks on a quest that leads towards a certain destination, but the steps along the way are subject to change with new information gained in any given interview" (p. 23). This observation about

the need for a responsive approach to interview methodology was reflected in my research design.

Specifically, this study's research design was built around three successive rounds of interview questions (see Appendices A, B, and C). The second and third rounds were built on the data obtained during the previous rounds, including general questions and customised questions based on individual principal's responses. The intent was to engage as deeply as possible with the issues raised by the participants in the earlier interview rounds.

Mears (2009) also discussed five areas that she believed together encompassed the traditional standards for research: validity, reliability, replicability, objectivity, and utility (p. 24). Given the nature of my study, objectivity and reliability in particular required careful consideration. In an effort to ensure that the outcomes of this thesis were true to the data, my study was directly based on the participating principals' perspectives as they answered the interview questions. There was no attempt to avoid their personal successes or concerns, or to not explore details of the matters raised. Through this information my research sought to inform the debate about SBM, innovation, and how these matters interact with system policies. It was all about engaging with practical perspectives in real contexts as explained by practicing, experienced school leaders, and by gathering the perspectives of key people undertaking "mediated activity" (Arnseth, 2008, p. 292). A more detailed discussion of reliability, objectivity, and replicability as they relate to the current study will be provided later in this chapter, along with a discussion of activity theory as the basis for this study's theoretical frame.

In terms of utility, the purposes that have been served by my interview-based study strongly paralleled Mears' (2009) concepts of what studies of this type should

encompass. That is, the sharing of events so that a deeper understanding might be gained of the professional lives of the principal participants, with the result that interested parties could "better comprehend their actions, decisions, responses, perceptions and beliefs" (Mears, 2009, p. 29). The methodology draws on Mears' concepts to provide a mechanism to illuminate the research questions in such a way that we know more about those practical aspects of leadership that assist innovation within a given context.

Multiple Case Study Research

This study involved eight principals and these people became the cases for this investigation. Yin (2009) stated that it was important to understand that multiple case studies and single case studies are just variants of the same methodological framework. Yin (2009) emphasised that multiple cases had to be treated as "one would consider multiple experiments" (p. 53). In the current study, each case was selected to provide contrasts (for example, differences in specific school contexts) so that ultimately, the findings of the research as a whole may be considered as robust. Nevertheless, caution is required in the application of case study methodology because, as Merriam (1998) pointed out, it is possible to exaggerate or oversimplify a given situation or, of even greater concern, a researcher could "select from the available data that anything he wished for could be illustrated" (p. 42).

As part of a research study of eight American teachers working with African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) explored the need to understand detail, context, and the realities of a researcher's background and experiences if usable conclusions were to be drawn from qualitative study. Ladson-Billings indicated that who the researcher was as a person, and how their thinking had developed because of

their participation in particular cultural groups, must impact their research. As the researcher undertaking the current study, I operated within a paradigm encompassed by my professional views—ontologies that developed over an extended period based upon wide-ranging personal and professional experience. Patton (1975) described such paradigms as being very powerful when understanding the limitations of qualitative research-based findings because they were essentially a world view and contained a broad perspective on what was right and reasonable. Deeply understanding the field of inquiry and holding informed views about the matters being investigated have great potential in research. However, this capacity also represents constraints that need to be understood by a qualitative researcher and, even if addressed in a study's design and analysis processes, these constraints cannot be discounted. To this end, the introduction to Chapter 4 discusses processes of data verification.

Patton (1975) proposed that social scientists and evaluation researchers could quite legitimately be deeply involved in research activity. This is because being on the "inside of a phenomena" and at the core of applicable social knowledge in the field brings important insight based on experience. As Patton (1975) put it, this experience "generates interest, has purpose, a point of view, value, meaning, and intelligibility, as well as bias" (p. 14).

Due to the fluid nature of case study research, Merriam (1998) discussed the importance of the researcher having a high tolerance for ambiguity. In Merriam's (1998) view, case study research has to be flexible in its approach, and the application of this view of qualitative methodology—as set out in this chapter—has been taken into account. Each of the eight participating principals was unique and operated in a specific environment, and these two factors alone had a significant impact on their management activity and their perspectives on SBM and innovation.

Theoretical Frame

The field of action for this study was complex, personal, and aimed at increasing understanding of particular aspects of leadership at the local level. The theoretical frame discussed here would be considered by Yin (2009) as an organisational theory approach within multiple case study research. The skill set included gathering information in particular case study settings and being able to return to that setting, indeed, to work productively with one person on more than one occasion. In this study, the research design had to allow for solid detail at the practitioner level, so the theoretical frame was designed to focus upon the issues at hand, to provide a roadmap for future attention, and to justify the basis for the research actions and, very importantly, for the relevance of the results.

The basis for this theoretical framework was activity theory. In beginning to explore this approach, it was useful to consider the historical contributions of Vygotsky and his contemporary and "fellow traveller," Leontiev, to the field.

> Vygotsky's contribution placed great emphasis on the need to develop robust theories and methodologies that would enable social scientists to study the ways in which people shape and are shaped by the artefacts that mediate their engagement with the world. (Daniels, 2008, p. 2)

Vygotsky thought that important gains in understanding people in context could be obtained by carefully considering "mediated activity." He was committed to the view that you had to consider peoples' socio-historical existence to explain their behaviour:

> Vygotsky argued that individual and environment should not be viewed as distinct, separate factors that can in some way be added up to explain the individual's development and behaviour. Rather, we should conceive of

individual and environment as factors that mutually shape each other in a spiral

process of growth. (Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007, p. 22)

The theoretical foundations of activity theory have proven especially useful in

framing distributed conceptions of leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2004), including

the decentralisation of authority from the system level to schools (SBM) and distributed

models of leadership within schools. This again indicates the value of "mediated

activity" for this research work.

As for the current study, where principal's perceptions were being accessed to

provide data, there was no need to separate the individual and their environment.

Wertsch (1985), when analysing the parallel work of a Vygotsky contemporary, the

Russian psychologist, A. N. Leontiev, found that Leontiev's views relating to activity

theory diverged from aspects of Vygotsky's research but still followed his basic tenets.

According to Wertsch, Leontiev's variation was that we should accept the value of

holistically exploring any social activity. Specifically, Leontiev wanted to enable theory

and methodology about social relations to better engage with *how* these social relations

were being governed; in his view, this was by the economic, political, and cultural

institutions that the subject of the research might be experiencing. Leontiev's ideas

remain contemporary and according to Ivannikov (2013), they underpin important

aspects of modern clinical psychology. The expansion of Vygotsky's activity theory to

take into account Leontiev's approaches has proved very useful in supporting the

theoretical basis of my study.

Daniels (2008) referred to writings by Cole and Engeström (1993) that clearly

pointed to the advantages of activity theory for a study such as mine, where school

principals were acting within their own particular leadership environment and as part of

a larger system. He agreed with Cole and Engeström's (1993) view about the

importance of investigating the powers, activities, and tasks of an activity system; this is because both the environment and the subject (here a school principal) are mutually affected by such mediated activity. Importantly, Cole and Engeström (1993) claimed that "work activity in a complex organisation is an obvious case of distributed, artefact mediated cognition" (p. 30). This is important because of the size and complex nature of the NSW public education system and the pivotal role of the school principal's work activity within that system.

Underlying the use of activity theory in this study was the idea that knowledge is a social construct achieved by collaboration within a particular culture. Individuals trying to meet their objectives are doing so in a way that means cognition is shared between them (Salomon, 1997). In particular, a concept that was of interest to the current study was the idea that the task of implementing programs that lead to effective schooling for students is complex, and will not be achieved by leaders acting in isolation (Hatcher, 2005). The matters of shared leadership and changing professional environments for principals, exemplified by SBM, also needed to be supported by the current study's theoretical frame.

Overall, activity theory was the best theoretical fit for this study of the drivers and impediments to site-based innovation because principals need to work within contradictions and dilemmas; they have to manage a plethora of policies, rules, expectations, and community perceptions (Hopson et al., 2014). It was clear that they worked closely with colleague principals. School leaders in this study were part of a large, state-based system of education. In that environment, they were continuously negotiating the distribution of tasks and responsibilities to achieve the complex goals of a modern high school. Blasé (2005) discussed concepts such as these by framing them as issues of micro-politics, those relationship interactions between school personnel—

interactions about role fairness, workload, and resource sharing (inter alia) that occur on a day-to-day basis. However, in reality it is broader than this because added to the micro-politics was a principal's personal growth, as well as the changes that are ever present in the economic, political, and cultural milieu of their working environments (Hargreaves, 2000; Hughes & Brock, 2008; Johnson, 2004).

Some distributed leadership authors have argued that the thinking and practice of leadership was "stretched" across school leaders and the cultural and organisational environment in which they worked (Nardi, 1996) and this has been allowed for in the chosen theoretical frame. Youngs (2014) pointed out that if you want to understand if, why, and how shared forms of leadership are present in educational case studies, the researcher will need to carefully consider the uniqueness of each school in the study and, as such, its educative, social, cultural, and political contexts may all require examination. Usefully for the current study, activity theory integrates context as a fundamental and constituting component of practice with the advantage of incorporating shared leadership as an integral part of its application. Therefore, for the current study, there was no need nor any intent to separate the individual and their environment, nor any intent to exclude discussion about collaboration or coherence or the actions of the system, nor any attempt to limit the span of discussion around these or any related issues that the participants might raise.

This study's chosen strategy to understand the drivers and impediments that the principals were experiencing, allowing for context and complexity, was via understanding principal practice through their own statements. Figure 3 sets out the place of activity theory, school improvement and effectiveness, devolved leadership, and broader leadership issues, in the theoretical framework of the current study. This operational framework readily accommodates system-level drivers (or impediments)

that principals are likely to experience in the NSW public education system. As Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) pointed out, "the past shapes our aspirations for and orientations to change in the present and the future" (p. 3). Past experiences affect current circumstances and provide an important source of ongoing development for principals (Brady, 2014; Fullan, 2000a, 2011).

Activity theory as a broad theoretical frame	Nature, scope and relevance of institutional, social and material contexts when accounting for meanings and functions (Arnseth, 2008) Person (the principal) acting in general and specific settings, immersed in a culture	
Effective Schools paradigm	**School improvement and effectiveness criteria:** • Principal leads instruction • Pervasive focus on instruction quality • Safe, positive climate • Staff view that students can succeed • Effective accountability and improved programs Edmonds (1982)	**System drivers criteria:** • Intrinsic motivation for teachers and students • Instructional improvement • Collective motivation and team work • Engage everybody to build positive momentum = "allness" Fullan (2011)
Devolved Leadership	**School based management SBM:** • Local Schools Local Decisions • Community expectations • Changing political landscape	Professional learning and leadership development in the context of reform Agendas including SBM
Leadership Issues	• Demands of accountability • Pace of change • Competing/contradictory demands of change • Implications for staffing and financial management	• Case studies of school innovation projects • Implications for student outcomes • Implications for principal authority/trust

Cultural Change?

Figure 3. Theoretical framework.

School Effectiveness and Cultural Change

Edmonds' (1982) seminal work was a major contributor to the so-called "effective schools movement," the notion that school success and effectiveness was strongly related to a set of characteristics or correlates. Correlates such as those derived from Edmonds' work and lists of what could make schools effective resonate across a plethora of scholarly papers; such information represents decades of research, and by directly and indirectly discussing and providing scholarly advice about school effectiveness they address principal effectiveness as well (Barber & Mourshed, 2007;

Blasé, 2005; Brady, 2014; Caldwell, 2004; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Dinham et al., 2011; Fullan, 2011; Green & Etheridge, 1999; Guskey, 1989; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Holmes et al., 2013; NSW SPC, 1999a; Townsend, 2011).

There are sound reasons why this study's theoretical frame needs to include school improvement and effectiveness criteria. It was inevitable that a study of principals' perceptions relating to leadership in complex times would discuss issues of effectiveness. One the key correlates from Edmonds' work was that effective school leaders needed to directly engage in the processes of instruction. Almost three decades later, Townsend (2011) pointed to the proportionally increasing role that school leaders have in promoting better teaching and learning in their school. Stoll (1996) emphasised that "although not every study of school effectiveness has come up with an identical list of the characteristics of effectiveness there is sufficient overlap of several of these elements to believe that there must be some consistency of impact across situations" (p. 56). According to Stoll (1996), school effectiveness and school improvement are not the same thing. Instead, she distinguishes improvement as the longer term goal of moving toward a vision.

Another reason for the prominence of school improvement and effectiveness as part of the theoretical frame was because you cannot innovate without making decisions about those effectiveness strategies that could suit your circumstances. In deciding *how* to be effective, you need to know where you want to go, what your vision might be, and what particular problem your innovation is trying to solve (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Kimmelman, 2010). As the tasks of leadership are pursued, it is important for school leaders to reflect on those issues that they think matter most (Hargreaves, 2005b; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). In Hargreaves' book, *Extending Educational Change* (2005a)*, Linda Darling-Hammond commented that "what ultimately happens in schools and

classrooms is less related to the intentions of policymakers than it is to the knowledge, beliefs, resources, leadership, and motivations that operate in local contexts" (p. 366). Her statement is particularly apposite for the current study. Notions such as these contribute a "how" element for the theoretical frame. The study was also designed to "get behind" the participants' views about their leadership issues and their effectiveness, injecting a critical "why" element. Gray, Jesson, and Reynolds (1996) counselled against "simple causal attributions." They claimed that factors obtained during effectiveness research should not be "seen as a blueprint for effectiveness" (p. 169). They also pointed out that an effectiveness factor could be about ineffectiveness in one setting, but about effectiveness in another.

Checklists of skills and competencies played no part in this study and were considered too naïve to capture the complex and highly contextualised work of principals in modern schools (Holmes et al., 2013). As previously noted, the approach taken was based on an understanding that school effectiveness is intertwined with principal effectiveness (inter alia) and dependent on how a school's leadership plays out "on the ground". While a principal may have a clear view of the basic tenets of what makes an effective school they will have to decide on their innovative actions based upon *their* perceptions of what is happening *locally*. This includes how their staff are responding to the changes they are introducing, how they as the school leader might be anticipating future trends, and their understanding of what might be happening in the external environment (Williams & Johnson, 2013).

Cultural change is important in underpinning most successful, sustainable innovations in schools (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Fullan, 2000a, 2001; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009) and there was strong support for the view that a particular school has its own particular culture (Fink & Stoll, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005b). In contrast, as an

example of how inappropriate culture can impede a school's program, Meier (2012) conducted an ethnographical case study about elementary science education that focussed on the cultural aspects of the educational change:

> As a primary finding, this study suggests that the existing school culture of the case study school is organized and driven by curricular motives and subsequent day-to-day routines in areas *other* than those towards effective science instruction. Therefore, the norms, values, beliefs, practices, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, use of materials, and perceived problems of all stakeholders in the school community contributed to a tenor of indifference within the school, in regards to effective science instruction. (p. 811)

The curriculum innovation that was the subject of Meier's (2012) case study was failing in large part because the school's culture did not support the change. It was focussed on other matters that left no room for acceptance or support for the changes in the school's approach to science based classes.

On the other hand, Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) studied Australian schools that were succeeding in improving their outcomes across a range of educational pursuits. In spite of the inherent difficulties at the schools studied, they posited that it was often an improved *culture* that underpinned, or was a consequence of, the approaches used by leaders and systems in order to try to improve the school's performance. MacNeil et al. (2009) put forward the view that:

> School principals who choose to lead rather than just manage must first understand their school's culture. It is important to realize that culture is complex because it has very unique and has idiosyncratic ways of working. When the complex patterns of beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas and behaviours in an organization are inappropriate or incongruent the culture will

ensure that things work badly. Successful school principals comprehend the

critical role that the organizational culture plays in developing a successful

school. (p. 74)

Cultural change was a necessary part of this theoretical frame in the sense that it

develops from the "how" and the "why" of a principal's operation within their context.

Fullan (2001) posited that while there was often the need to improve schools through

what he termed *reculturing* (with a particular emphasis on relationships), the wider

cultures at district and state levels could also impact a school's culture, and he wrote

about this extensively. In his view, local innovation and improved practices in schools

require reform manifesting at each level—system, district, and school—with processes

that encompass and provide coherence as part of this "tri-level" reform. Hargreaves and

Fullan (2012) believed it was about building both capacity and successful cultural

change. He further argued that system reform and capacity building were intricately

interwoven in the achievement of cultural change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

In summary, this theoretical framework was designed to set a strong, practical

basis for making sense of what was a broad ranging, personal view of complex,

contextual leadership matters. The broad premises on which this methodology was

based sees school leadership and effectiveness as interconnected; further, that people

and their environments need to be studied together; and, that principals are an important

component in a quest for an innovative school culture.

Participants

I used a multiple case study approach which required in-depth engagement with

eight NSW government school secondary principals; all leading schools of differing

contexts. The choice of eight principals/schools was about supporting the study with

both width and depth, a trade-off between working with a sufficient number of principals, a sufficient number of varied local situations, and the practical considerations of needing to conduct multiple site visits across a broad geographical area, including follow-ups as might be required after interviews. The case choices were about purposeful sampling to support the study's underlying purpose: to obtain understanding about what was happening in terms of the inquiry questions by engaging with the perceptions of experienced principals. The case choice criteria were pragmatic but strove to ensure that the goals of real insight, honesty, and sufficient detail about the factors operating in terms of positive drivers and impediments affecting in-school innovation could be achieved.

The principals were purposefully selected and criteria for selection were based on a broad range of circumstances including matters such as school size, location, current initiatives, principal experience and gender, and so on. As an example, school size mattered in terms of a principal managing significant variations in staff numbers and budgets. The intention was to include at least one school with an enrolment of over 1,200 students, and at least one smaller school with an enrolment of less than 500. Another criteria example was that at least half of the selected schools had to be part of the LSLD initiative.

Gender can matter in leadership (Patel, 2013) and thus a balance of male and female principals was sought. For example, the 2013 TALIS study reported only 39% of Australian principals were female, the lowest proportion recorded by the OECD (2016a). It was also important to consider leadership experience. It was decided to engage experienced principals who could provide perceptions based on extensive knowledge of the principal's role (Sinnema et al., 2016), and who may not be

experiencing the pressures that can often accompany new appointments (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009; Fink & Brayman, 2006).

At a general level of approach, a broad range of educational contexts was sought. The eight principals involved were differentiated in terms of their school's curriculum emphases, IT engagement, learning processes for students, staff development approaches, collaboration levels, age of the school, district/area location and student remediation systems. Schools that were selected had major innovations in process or in planning, directly relating to the study's interest in the impact of SBM on innovation and reform. The intention was to canvas principals working in a range of lower, middle, and upper socio-economic status (SES) communities so a full range of ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) measures was sought. Yet all the principals involved were part of the DoE system, and so, in that sense, they experienced significant similarities irrespective of socio-economic variation.

It was decided that participants whose work and schools fell within the criteria range could provide rich insight into the many complex processes affecting their leadership, their interactions with the system, and their achievements in leading innovation, provided they had significant experience because their experience had the potential to provide a grounded view of the "bigger picture" of current educational matters. This may not be the case with inexperienced principals, who are often coping with a raft of new responsibilities and experiencing a steep learning curve about their own school and the multiple roles of principalship. Day (2002) posited that:

> There has been a recognition that principals, like teachers, will be in different phases of their development. Not all will be expert, not all feel comfortable with turbulence, change and uncertainty which characterises education. Not all will

have well-developed people skills nor be natural transformational or liberating

leaders, either by disposition or ability. (p. 89)

A pragmatic decision was made to select schools from the greater metropolitan

Sydney and Newcastle regions (these two cities are about 160 kms apart by road) to

make it feasible for me as a researcher (a resident of northern Sydney) to attend the

schools in order to conduct interviews. Nevertheless, the Sydney and Newcastle areas,

when considered together, usefully provided broad variations of learning community

settings.

NSW Government schools work within a system that encompasses over 2,200

schools, which are allocated to areas or districts with a senior officer leading these

geographical groupings. It was likely that local, district (as at time of writing in NSW

these are called areas), and system forces, positive drivers that could assist change as

well as a range of impediments, would all feature as part of what the principals would

discuss during interviews.

In summary, this research was designed to be based upon a purposeful sample,

taking advantage of system knowledge, professional contacts, and access to useful

documents (for example, ICSEA scores, non-English speaking and Indigenous

enrolments, Annual School Reports, and published financial statements). The

researcher's professional experiences required that there be self-imposed limitations for

the study in terms of participant choice. In practice, such limitations added to the

complexity as final choices had to be undertaken carefully on a case-by-case basis while

still pursuing the case study selection factors discussed earlier (Yin, 2009). The research

proposed in this paper was to be conducted at the personal level, so it was imperative

that ethical constraints and choices had to be transparently observed from the start by

using both appropriate processes for choosing the cases and setting out clearly the

reasons for these decisions. Prior to the study commencing, human research ethics approval was sought and granted by the University's ethics committee (see Appendix D). Permission to interview DoE principals was sought and approved under SERAP (State Education Research Applications Process; see Appendix E). One advantage of this broad approach to case choice which was designed to ensure that this study's purposes could be achieved, was that it helped me to identify whether patterns that appeared in participant responses were systemic, local, and/or personal in nature.

Bias in Case Selection

In 2015, there were 422 government secondary schools in NSW. If only considering the research questions, then many NSW government high schools could have been case study candidates for this work. Apart from the factors for choosing the participants set out above, there were other constraints and this included the potential problem of bias.

For a multiple case study such as this, Yin (2009) suggested practical screening procedures but pointed to a process that should be avoided at all costs. He identified this negative process as "an extensive screening procedure that effectively becomes a mini case study of every candidate case" (p. 91). He suggested using a broader approach to start, perhaps using general or even quantitative data (in this case from the NSW school system) to reduce the possible number of choices to 20 or 30 cases. Following this, he advocated querying relevant people, who were knowledgeable about each case and/or using documentation to assist in final selections that would suit the study's purposes and criteria for selection. This was indeed how the participant list for this research was arrived at, and it required delicate ethical procedures as information was obtained to

ensure that the anonymity of the chosen cases remained viable. There was also strong input to the process of case selection by my supervisors.

In conducting this study, I had extensive contemporary knowledge of many principals in NSW high schools, he is adept at obtaining system level and local school data, and had access to other relevant, knowledgeable people in the SPC and the system itself. It was decided that these attributes would greatly contribute to obtaining a suitable group of participants but to reduce any potential bias, the final principal choices would be made by the researcher in conjunction with his supervisors, as were decisions about participant selection and the actual screening processes. Professors Fischetti and Smith are highly experienced, senior researchers with the majority of their experience in the United States and Australia, respectively. In practice, case study selection became an interactive and time-consuming process that faithfully and ethically applied the selection criteria described above to select the participants. Potential participants were frequently set aside, even where the fit was strong, to avoid possible conflict of interest situations. However, the fact that the researcher had worked with a particular principal or school at some stage in the past was not in itself a reason for exclusion, given that at the time of the study was five years since these relationships were active.

The result of the selection process is set out in Table 2 in Chapter 4. The principals/schools were assigned anonymous alphabetic codes to maintain confidentiality.

Limitations, Informed Consent, Confidentiality

Informed consent involves providing participants with clear information about what participating in a research project will involve, and giving them the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to participate (see Appendix F). Given the educational

seniority and experience of the participants in this research and the fact that the researcher knew some of them, choosing the best approaches for informed consent—and especially the right for a participant to withdraw from the study—needed careful consideration. Wiles (2013) provided a useful summary of what was required in this respect:

> Specifically, research participants need to be made aware of what the research is about; why it is being conducted; who is funding it; what will happen to the results and how they will be disseminated; what their participation in the project will involve; what the potential risks and benefits of their involvement might be; and, how issues of anonymity and confidentiality will be managed. Potential research participants should also be made aware that they are not obliged to take part and that they can withdraw from the study if they later change their mind about participating. (p. 25)

Wiles' (2013) summary was the basis for the participant information statement contained in the Appendices of this thesis.

Yin (2009) referred to the expectations that may exist because of institutional settings; in this case, the institutions were the University of Newcastle and the NSW DoE. The approvals for this research from the institutions involved are detailed in the Appendices. Yin (2009) pointed out that because case study research of this nature was conducted through direct contact with the "cases", careful and thoughtful approaches to the ethical positioning of the work had to be undertaken. For the purposes of this study's methodology, which placed a focus on a contemporary phenomenon in its real life context, there are implications for the researcher's written and spoken involvement with the participants. Specifically, the need for absolute care for the human subjects and rigorous confidentiality provisions throughout the period of the study (and as required

thereafter), as well as the application of thorough data security, according to Yin (2009), means that researchers have to maintain a standard that parallels that of medical research.

Principals are characteristically highly skilled people, often the most successful practitioners in their field to obtain their positions, and they lead and manage in extremely complex environments (Clifford, 2010). It would not be expected given the case choice criteria that there would be issues of capacity or risks of deceit, but other concerns could arise for senior practitioners should they provide candid criticism of their professional environment and/or of their supervisors.

This issue was clearly explained by Wiles (2013). While not anticipated to be a major concern, the participating principals did have supervisors who could have had negative attitudes towards the study or a particular participant's involvement in it. However, the widely recognised professionalism of the senior members of the DEC, the high ethical standards applied throughout this study, and the rigours of the research design were considered to be sufficient enough to ameliorate this risk. In fact, it was felt more likely that the participants themselves might raise their involvement in the study with their supervisors or colleagues in professional discussions or even as a matter of courtesy. The response to this possibility was for me to maintain a careful watching brief around these matters throughout the project.

No research was undertaken prior to written detailed consent information being given to the principals, and no research was undertaken until the principals consented to participation in writing. This consent followed an initial letter requesting an expression of interest in the study from Professor Smith (as the responsible Chief Investigator), followed up by a phone conversation with the researcher and/or Professor Smith. A personal call was made by the researcher to potential participants to allow any questions

to be answered before their final acceptance. The first interview protocols were made available to participants one week prior to these interviews. As previously noted, confidentiality for the duration of the study was set as the highest priority. All transcripts, notes, printed material, and audio recordings were stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's home and ultimately will be confidentially archived at the University of Newcastle. All names, addresses, and other identifying information were kept in a separate and secure location from the transcripts. To ensure anonymity, school identities and the names of the principal participants were de-identified in all research data. Each participant received an information letter outlining the details of the study and the confidentiality arrangements. Consent forms were returned to the researcher (see Appendix G).

A process was devised to mitigate against the risks of exaggeration, oversimplification, or selectivity during preliminary data analysis and coding. This involved meetings between the researcher and his supervisors who together comprise the "research team" with the addition of a highly experienced, well-regarded secondary principal acting as a critical friend to that team (LaBoskey, 2004). This group confidentially discussed the raw data, the coding processes, and emerging themes. Raw data, as well as copies of coded transcripts and draft findings, were made available prior to the meeting and a confidentiality agreement was signed by the principal stating that no information from the meeting was to be revealed to any person.

Interviews and Questions

The principals who volunteered for this study were, of course, all different people operating in quite different contexts but the question protocols and the processes of the study remained the same for all participants albeit that for the Phase 2 protocols

there were two questions exploring a participant's specific views on a matter that was previously raised. Notwithstanding this, the crucial issue of research replicability across the cases was adhered to. Mears (2009) sums up these concerns when she stated that replicability should be "measured relative to the transparency of procedures, consistency of the work, reasonableness of results based on the interview data and disclosure of the researcher's connection and subjective knowing that may have influenced the conduct of the study" (p. 27).

Notions such as these have been thoughtfully applied in the current research. For example, Mears' advice that a potent way to address bias was to "proceed from a position of reflection, candour and disclosure" (p. 27). I have applied both candour and disclosure in respect of the processes of data gathering—processes that were also designed to allow extensive reflection based on the transcripts. This has led to accurate, hopefully meaningful reporting of the participants' views. In terms of reliability, there were potentially mixed purposes in this study in that it simultaneously tried to uncover individual meanings and make generalisations about participants' perceptions in terms of the research questions. Both these aspects can be assessed by "reflecting on the data with an eye to the purpose and focus of the research" (Mears, 2009, p. 26).

The questions used in this qualitative study were of the open-ended type. Creswell (2008) considers one-on-one interviews as an ideal approach for participants who "are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably" (p. 226). In reality, school principals need qualities like these to obtain and to retain their positions, and thus it was not surprising that the participants had little difficulty articulating their views or comfortably sharing their ideas, purposes, and concerns.

Furthermore, Creswell (2008) considered such interviews as the best choice because they allow the researcher to delve deeper and explore a range of possibilities

without constraining individual responses. Creswell (2008) argued that the quality of

the questions used in interviews was very important. Unambiguous and clear questions

were preferred as then there would be a low risk of confusing participants.

Fundamentally, good questions inherently show respect and over time contribute to the

building of trust. In practice, given the nature of those participating in this study and

given, as previously noted, that the relationship between participant and researcher was

essentially peer to peer, the interviews worked well in a semi-structured format.

The responses in this study were digitally recorded and transcribed by a

reputable, confidentiality-endorsed transcription service. The seniority and experience

of the participants meant that their responses were often nuanced, thoughtful, and multi-

faceted.

The Gateway Approach

I wanted to bring to this research the possibility of eliciting meaningful

connections between the thesis reader and matters of substance that the principals were

discussing. There are confounding complexities and at times significant traumas in the

professional life of a principal, and my experience in the field allowed me a genuine

capacity to respectfully understand and explore the matters that they raised. This

research followed Mears' (2009) "gateway approach" or what Creswell (2008) has

referred to as "emerging processes in qualitative research" (p. 141). Mears (2009)

developed her ideas while researching the shootings at Columbine High School, and this

work was based upon in-depth interviews. Her processes were designed to deliver a

genuine and thorough understanding of the thoughts and positions that the narrator

provided.

Importantly, according to Mears (2009), the gateway approach has the potential "for disclosing the very real effects of situations, programs, actions, decisions, and events on the individuals involved"; this allows researchers "to get beyond the simple facts that can be disclosed through a questionnaire" (p. 146). This is exactly what I wanted the interviews to achieve. As such, the interview system that has been used in this study follows Mears' (2009) multiple interview approach so that successive interviews built depth of meaning from the previous ones. As we have seen, each interview protocol was directly built from information gained in the previous interview, with the aim of obtaining a deeper understanding about the participants' views. The study's research questions were used to navigate and guide this rich process. Furthermore, in keeping with Mears' (2009) recommendations, this study used three sequential interviews for each participant spanning a 10-month period from February to November, 2016.

Member Checking

To assist with individualising and member checking each case, individual participants received two questions that were specifically for them (only in the Phase 2 interview protocol), and these two questions were developed from their previous Phase 1 interview responses. This enabled specific extension of the ideas that they had previously posited and proved useful in helping to understand the differences between participants on particular matters. The design of the interview process helped me to understand the perceptions of the principals in a non-trivial way, and it allowed for their perceptions to develop depth and nuance over time. Also, following the gateway process naturally built in a process of member checking, because for each succeeding interview phase, the questions were based on participant input. The participants'

answers to Phases 2 and 3 thus effectively served as a check on the correctness of interpretations made from earlier phases.

Research Questions

Yin (2009) discussed what he called the Level 1 and Level 2 questions in a case study such as this. Level 2 questions are the questions of the *inquiry*, to be answered by the investigator (the four research questions shown below), and Level 1 questions are for the field: the interview protocol questions. Yin noted that it was "a trap" to see them as synonymous because the verbal line of inquiry was different to the mental line of inquiry.

The following inquiry (Level 2) research questions reflect the aims of this study and have guided the choice and direction of the methodology. The Phase 1 interview protocol set out at the end of this chapter demonstrates a direct line of sight from these inquiry questions to the Phase 1 interview questions.

1. What are principals' perceptions of the current drivers or impediments to change as they lead in a school based management environment?

2. What theoretical and practical approaches are principals using to design, implement, and maintain innovation in their school?

3. How is evidence used, and what data sources are used, to identify, monitor, and evaluate their change efforts in SBM?

4. Have the principals changed or modified their leadership practice in the SBM environment?
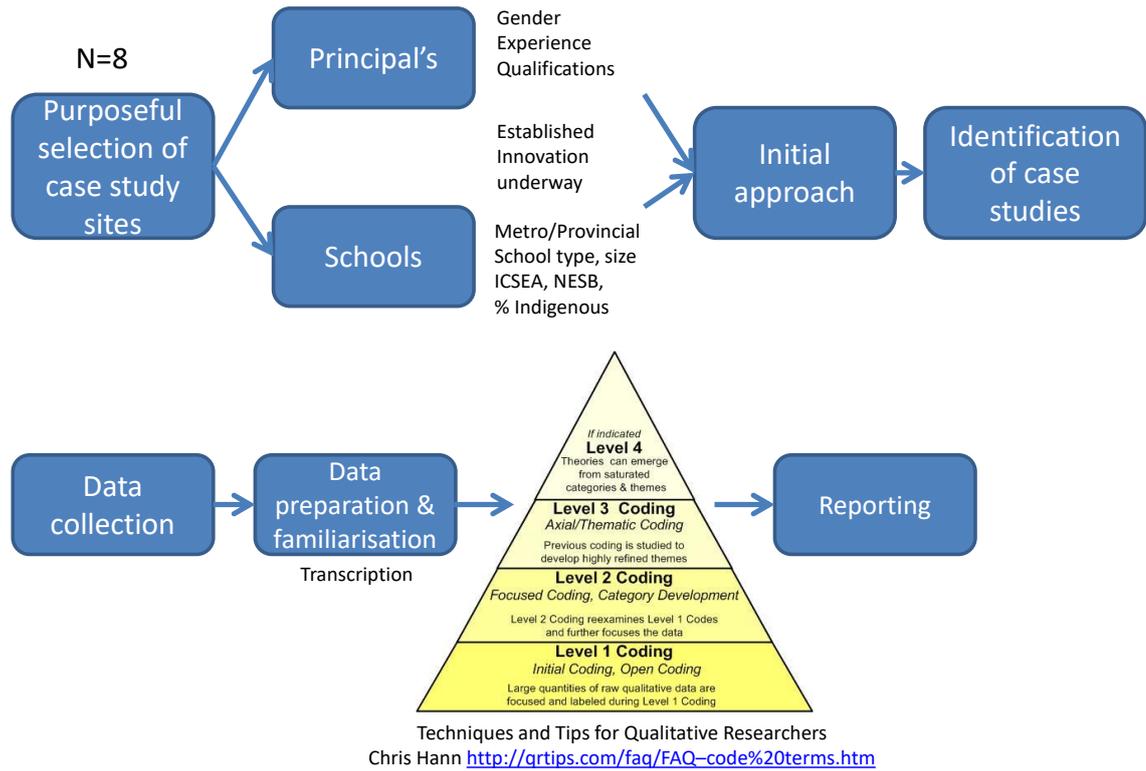
Figure 4. Analytical framework.

In terms of the analytical frame, the data collected from this study involved a simultaneous process of analysing while collecting data. This was useful because data collection and data analysis are closely woven terms in qualitative work, and are thus part of an iterative process rather than independent activities (Creswell, 2008). This was particularly important given this study's use of Mears' gateway approach. In practical terms, this meant that initial themes that reflected some of the common views espoused by the principals were modified and strengthened as the interviews progressed.

It is important to make clear at this point that this study did not set out to test a theoretical proposition, but rather to explore specific issues about how principals are coping with contemporary education reform agendas. These agendas were discussed by the participants in terms of the drivers and impediments that they perceived were affecting their ability to innovate within their schools.

To overcome Mears' (2009) objection to potential loss of meaning when data is coded and organised, where possible, in-vivo coding has been used (that is, coding that directly reflected the participants' actual words). This was made easier because of the articulate nature of the participants. Creswell's (2008) "lean coding" approach was used (p. 252): a first run through the transcript was designed to get a sense of the overall intent, and then a few codes were established and applied; later, as more detail and meaning was extracted from the data, more codes were built. As set out in the diagram above, this initial approach allowed for a more meaningful final coding approach (Hahn, 2008). Given the limitations of this study, level 4 coding (Hahn, 2008) could not be about theory development. Instead, it took the form of a reporting phase that identified possible ways forward based on the total evidence gathered (Chapter 8). This required careful consideration of the *interactions* between the external and internal forces the principals were experiencing, the positive drivers and impediments they were managing, and the meanings of all these phenomena in terms of the participants' concerns and actions.

There was much to be gained from deeply engaging with the themes that developed as a result of the interview protocols. All the participating principals were experiencing a period of reform, all were trying to innovate, and all were part of the NSW public education system and therefore required to follow its policies. Further, given the major roles that *all* school principals perform such as planning, financial control, curriculum, human resource management, student welfare, staff supervision, and so on (NSW SPC, 1999b), it was unsurprising that there would be common views among the participants in general terms. What proved very useful, a little unexpected, and illuminating was the extent of those common views as they related to the particular focus of this study's research questions.

Following the gateway approach, it became clear that the need for an iterative approach to analysis would be important. Research practice had to move constantly between data collection and analysis, returning periodically to the raw data for each principal. Given the breadth of participant situations, this was challenging but necessary work to make interpretive sense of what was being said by the principals across diverse situations. It was also an opportunity to deeply explore those matters that the coding processes suggested might become themes.

Research Tools

In this study there were three important research tools: the researcher, the participant, and the technology. That is not to decry the extraordinary value of my supervisors, the literature, or any of the other supporters that helped to facilitate this research project. Nevertheless the primary research tool for this work was the researcher. Merriam (1998) described the researcher in qualitative studies as "the primary instrument for gathering and analysing data" (p. 20). While she pointed out the potential fallibility of a human as a research tool, she delved deeply into the capacity for a person to maximise the complex, elaborating on the advantages that a human can bring to qualitative study. She noted that only a human can endlessly adjust to situation changes and "unforeseen events". Humans could solve problems of process or information sensitivities with great sophistication, particularly where relationships and complex matters that vary between particular situations and particular people were being studied. Merriam (1998) wrote that discretion, intuition, and empathy were required researcher traits, but also mentioned sensitivity to personal bias and the effect of personal experiences and situations, because these factors, if improperly understood, could be crucial to obtaining meaningful outcomes from the study.

If human perceptions are at the heart of this study, then one of the key research tools was the participants themselves. Patton (1975) compared paradigms of social research, the scientific method, and less structured, more qualitative approaches, and suggested that meaning can be better found from a study where the researcher becomes involved with the participant in the act of gathering data. His "alternative paradigm" stressed the importance of meaning, context, and subjective underpinnings for understanding behaviours and actions. That is, the researcher is involved with the participant as data, meaning, and understandings are accumulated. In this study, the processes by which data was gathered could be described as a peer-to-peer interaction, designed so that meaning found its way into the data, and was a result of the social context that was shared between the researcher and participants. Patton (2002) suggested that:

> An evaluator or interviewer faces the challenge of making it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the quality of the interviewer. (p. 341)

Rubin and Rubin (2005) pointed to the value of a research project where interviews not only engaged the participants, but by their nature built professional relationships: "an interview is part of a developing relationship in which issues of mutual interest are explored in depth" (p. 26).

In respect of technology, the Olympus VN-731PC digital voice recorder was the other important research tool. As previously explained, the recordings were transcribed by Digital Transcriptions (a professional transcription service) into Word upon their receipt of the digital audio file. I accessed the transcripts using a password-protected website. To ensure accuracy, spot checks were made from time to time between the

audio and Word transcriptions. During interviews, participants' comments were also recorded as a backup using a smartphone, and once the transcriptions were received and checked, these recordings were deleted from the phone. For the Phase 3 (telephone) interviews, the same process was used.

Researcher Background

If the researcher is the primary tool for a study such as this then a brief declaration of background is required. I have held roles as a secondary teacher, curriculum consultant, secondary principal (two very different schools), superintendent, school education director, and DoE senior project officer. These experiences were not the only developmental impacts. From the early 1990s, Michael Fullan was beginning to point to the importance of what today would be called a coherent approach; in his view, this involved ensuring a system and its schools were working together towards common goals. It became clear to me that principals had a role to play in formulating and enacting reform that extended well past their schools' boundaries, to the system and the broader educational community. The questions then became: did principals know what that role should or could be; could such a broad role be realistically achieved; and, how much autonomy would support such growth and role sophistication?

In particular, could a range of research efforts establish whether it was an advantage to task principals with local decision-making power (SBM) given the ongoing forces for educational change? Could it be established whether increased local control of the key resources that allow a school to function—simply put, money and people—would actually make a difference alongside other drivers of reform? Regardless of this, what might be inhibiting innovative gains from principal leadership?

In my view, these types of questions provide a challenging, exciting, contemporary, meaningful, and potentially very valuable area for ongoing research. I have made every effort to ensure that this thesis provides a useful start to meaningfully engage with such questions. If a range of research efforts could lead us to make better sense of how effective leadership, supportive policy, effective schooling, and innovative practice interact at a school operational level then ultimately, there could be opportunities to improve student outcomes (Caldwell, 2016).

Conclusion

When designing methodology for qualitative research such as that undertaken in the current study, it is a requirement that "the inquirer emphasises the importance of learning from participants in a setting" (Creswell, 2008, p. 515). This study's methodology has reflected such an emphasis. Furthermore, this study's participants generally indicated that they believed that participation in the study had been of developmental benefit for them, as one participant indicated, participation had helped him to clarify his own thinking about the many of the matters discussed. Indeed, Makar and O'Brien (2013), in discussing their project involving classroom teachers, posited that both the participants and the researchers achieved empowerment and transformation through their joint engagement in the research.

As previously discussed, one intended outcome of this study was to contribute to the discourse about school effectiveness or, more precisely, how school leaders could improve their school's potential for innovation, reform, and improvement given that there will be positive drivers and challenging impediments present in their management sphere.

This study's rationale, research design, and methodology have been extensively discussed in this chapter. The methodology chosen sought to provide theoretical and analytical frameworks that (within the limitations previously described) embrace both context and complexity. Indeed, the approach used was intended to maximise depth in the evidence while accepting the contextual nature of the data. By doing so, this limited the use of the research outcomes to providing some possible ways forward within specific parts of an extraordinarily complex whole. Nevertheless, even with such a limitation, I trust that this study can still make a valuable contribution to current educational reform and innovation discourses.

Chapter 4

Phase 1 Interview Results

The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice.... "Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" said Alice. "That depends a good deal on where you want to go from here," said the Cat. "I don't much care where—" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat. "—so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation. "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if only you walk long enough."

Carroll (2008/1865, p. 42)

Introduction

"An interview researcher embarks on a quest that leads towards a certain destination" (Mears, 2009, p. 23). The multiple case study approach described in the previous chapter was specifically designed to provide detailed insights, with respect to the research questions, based on the views of the eight principal participants. Analysis of the data collected was used to identify common concepts and themes raised by the

participants. This chapter reports on the responses provided by the participating

principals to the interview questions that they were asked in this first phase.

The first part of this chapter sets out the coding and data verification processes

used in this study and, to enhance reader understanding, a list of preliminary themes that

were developed during this phase. This is followed by general information about the

principal participants and their schools in tabulated form. This is of value to the reader

because it explicates the extent of the case variations.

The second part of this chapter reports in detail on the information gathered

during February and March 2016 using the first interview protocol. In the responses

tabled here, sub-theme headings help organise the major ideas. Principal participants

were allocated a two-letter code to ensure their privacy. For example, PY indicates

"Principal Y." At times, direct quotes from particular principals are identified using this

nomenclature.

The responses to Question 2 include details about innovations currently being

undertaken at each principal's school. The purpose of this question was to assist the

reader to understand the scope and depth of change that these principals were engaging

with, often on a daily basis. To conclude this section, information is provided that

briefly explores the unique perceptions that were raised by individual principals.

The third part develops the Phase1 themes and explicates the deeper and more

incisive matters that were raised by participants. In keeping with the gateway approach,

Phase 1 data were used to build the second interview protocol.

Coding and Validating the Data

Yin (2009) pointed out that for valid analysis of case study data, much depends

upon the investigator's approaches. This includes the investigator's decisions regarding

depth of evidence, how he or she considers other possible interpretations of the data, the way evidence is presented, and how rigorously investigators are in remaining impartial and objective. Yin (2009) provided advice about the importance of careful data analysis, positing that to not thoroughly interrogate and reflect as objectively as possible on the data could engender a less than full explanation of the cases. He summarised, noting that "the reward for careful, thorough, introspective analysis in case study research is the production of compelling case studies" (p. 127).

The coding approach used in this study incorporated some of the concepts, ideas, and caveats of four qualitative researchers: Yin (2009), Creswell (2008), Hahn (2008), and Mears (2009). Each offers useful advice and guidance on processes for multiple case study research.

In 1865, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), through the vehicle of Alice and the Cheshire cat, pointed out the importance of planning where you want to go before you begin a journey. It was Hahn (2008) who offered the clearest advice on planning and intentions, noting the virtue of carefully considering the purpose, directions, and design of research projects before deciding on the most suitable coding processes to follow. As described in Chapter 3, the coding process used in the current study was designed to be iterative, building increasing meaning into the available material through successive phases of data gathering and analysis (Mears, 2009). Each successive set of interactions with the participants was based on and built upon their previous responses (both collectively and individually).

The coding process used a manual approach throughout, closely resembling the building themes from codes approaches of Creswell (2008) and Hahn (2008). Hahn advocated that researchers should not shy away from the focussed, sometimes complex and difficult nature of coding tasks. He pointed out that "qualitative data will always

present analytical challenges. To be dependable, qualitative studies must be backed by solid research methods and an orderly structure" (p. 33).

The Coding Process

The coding of the Phase 1 interviews involved a six-step process:

1. A first pass through the transcripts was designed to get a sense of the overall intent, the first step in Creswell's "lean coding" approach. I reread all eight transcripts in their entirety to refresh my memory of the interviews, and to obtain baseline ideas about the perceptions being offered by the principals. Four of the transcripts were then selected at random with a view to establishing a few promising codes to help direct and organise interview question responses, intending to later build on these codes as more detail and meaning was extracted from the data. At this point, a general coding approach was applied using "what, why, and how" questions as organising devices. These queries were then partitioned into the following categories: values, attitudes, beliefs, and context. This provided some preliminary learnings, but upon deeper reflection and review and following careful consideration of the research questions, it became obvious that greater depth and clarity of understanding were needed. The decision made was to take another pass to reconsider the data with more direct reference to the research questions.

2. In the second pass, transcript text passages were highlighted where it seemed they had direct and important connotations considered against both the Phase 1 interview questions and the broader (level 2) research questions, heeding Yin's (2009) advice that these two types of research questions are not necessarily synonymous. In keeping with advice of Creswell (2008), I wrote several pages

of descriptive prose that chronologically summarised the flow of discussion in each interview. This was useful in isolating and ordering the major concepts, from basic to sophisticated, and helped to organise and prioritise the concepts that had been raised.

3.   These preliminary steps facilitated the development of the final coding process. The third pass of coding moved from an initial or open form to a more focussed form of coding. This was followed by theme development where groups of concepts were aggregated into a summary statement (Hahn, 2008). This resulted in seven themes that were listed and colour-coded ready for application to a freshly printed set of transcripts.

4.   For the purposes of understanding this coding process, concepts contributed to building sub-themes and later higher order themes. For example, a concept raised by a number of participants was that understanding and reflecting upon educational theory and research, while potentially valuable in assisting innovation, was not necessarily a key feature of the day-to-day work of principals. Indeed, exploration and use of current educational theories was highly individual and related to a principal's context and workload. Such ideas contributed to the sub-theme "*theory as background*" and ultimately, to a higher order theme of "Personal leadership capacities and SBM."

5.   The detailed colour coding was an attempt to faithfully relate to the perceptions of the principals, both individually and as a group. As the work progressed, it became increasingly obvious that there was considerable commonality among the participants' answers and that these could be captured in the form of themes and sub-themes.

6.   Finally, using the themes as headings, the key concepts raised by individuals and across the group were recorded in dot point form; this was designed to convey to the reader maximum depth of information from the data in relation to each theme. This detailed information provided a defensible basis for building deeper meaning and a more comprehensive understanding of the results.

Validation of the Coding Process

"The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'confirmability'—that is, their validity" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). In the current study, the validation process (as described below) was carried out following the completion of the drafts of the result chapters.

*   A panel meeting was convened with a three-hour schedule and a plan pre-approved by participants.

*   In attendance were Professors Fischetti and Smith, myself, and acting as a critical friend, a highly regarded, practicing secondary principal from a NSW school who had similar experience to the participants but had not participated in the study. This process was conducted under a signed confidentiality agreement.

*   All participants had received before the meeting:

    –   a copy of the raw data transcripts;

    –   a copy of the colour-coded transcripts (colour photocopied);

    –   a copy of the themes (with concept explanations) and the associated colours;

    –   copies of the annotated raw transcripts that were used to initiate the coding process; and,

    –   copies of the (then draft) results that are set out in this thesis

- The meeting commenced with an explanation of the validation processes, discussion of potential issues, and agreement around process.

- The panel members (excluding the researcher) each read two or three raw transcripts and then inspected the coded transcripts. Validation was provided in terms of the participant's agreement with the coding against the themes. Feedback and suggestions for improvement were encouraged, and the analysis and results were amended where necessary.

- Panel discussion then followed to identify the best possible ways in which to present the results and to describe the processes by which the results were obtained. The ultimate purpose was to convey the clarity, accuracy, and transparency of the process without risking participant identification.

There was strong support for the work being presented throughout this validation process by panel members, who agreed that the information conveyed by the themes and the results was accurate, that no information was unintentionally included or ignored, and that the presentation of the material authentically represented the perceptions of the participants as recorded (and coded) in the transcripts.

Phase 1 Themes

On the basis of participant responses, the Phase 1 themes derived and validated through the above processes were as follows (working coding colours in brackets):

Theme 1:   A failure of system reform? (Pink)

Theme 2:   Excessive system reforms, policies, inefficiency, mandated yet often-irrelevant actions; all these impede innovation and equality of outcomes (Green)

Theme 3: The principal's capacity to respond as this relates to the lack of effective structures, management processes, linkages, and context (Red)

Theme 4: Dealing with uncertainty (Dark blue)

Theme 5: Knowing your context, relevant data, applicable research concepts, having flexible resources, and a willingness to change direction as required; these matters drive innovation to a greater extent than SBM reform (Mauve)

Theme 6: Personal leadership capacities and SBM (Orange)

Theme 7: Multiple layers of bureaucracy (Light blue)

I considered providing in the Appendices an example of a colour-coded page from among the processed transcripts as many such pages exhibited multiple theme codes even within one paragraph. However, after considering a large number of pages with phrases and statements highlighted, it became clear that there would be a significant risk that someone with appropriate knowledge of NSW public secondary schools and principals might be able to deduce who the principal participant was. Ethical standards took precedence and consequently, no example has been provided.

Table 2 (below) sets out broad information about the participating principals and their schools. Viewing this table provides evidence that within the participant group, among their contexts, there is a great deal of variation.

Table 2

The Principals and Their Schools

Principal	School level/SBM involvement	School size [a]	Location	ICSEA and related information	Principal characteristics and/or some view of purpose	Innovations summary
Principal X (male)	**Not LSLD** Part of a community of schools group. Local planning and innovative actions were at a high level.	Small	Regional; Facilities of average level	ICSEA < 900 School has very high welfare demands.	This principal brings significant life experiences both public and private situations.	Working on a plan to generate better teaching and learning outcomes via better staff and family support and a particular curriculum focus.
Principal S (male)	**Not LSLD** Large, experienced staff. Significant local budget. Good community support. Innovative history	Large	Metropolitan; Facilities generally at a high level	ICSEA > 1100 Higher disposable income area. Significant enrolment competition.	This principal began his principalship more than a decade ago and has developed processes that have led to significant success for the staff, parents and students.	STEM classes in a junior year. Innovative approaches to technology use in teaching and learning.
Principal Y (female)	**LSLD school** Large budget with LSLD flexibilities. Strong community support for the school and principal.	Large	Metropolitan; Community emphasis is on value of education. Good to average facilities	ICSEA < 1100 Strong sporting and academic performances.	This principal has taken all available flexibility options to ensure that both low and high performing groups of students are given every opportunity to succeed.	Work on learning resilience for low performing students. More generally dealing with the burgeoning mental health issues of her students.

Principal	School level/SBM involvement	School size [a]	Location	ICSEA and related information	Principal characteristics and/or some view of purpose	Innovations summary
Principal T (male)	**Not LSLD** Students from many different language backgrounds. Strong academic results.	Medium	Metropolitan. Average to good facilities.	ICSEA > 1200 Families mostly well-educated and relatively wealthy.	This principal is equally happy leading and managing for less able students or those requiring high level, often complex educational needs, as well as leading and managing for those students who have the potential to obtain superior outcomes – not his first principalship.	Real world content in student learning as a critical part of curriculum – everyone on staff has the core business of appropriate programming.
Principal V (male)	**Not LSLD** Part of a community of schools group. Local planning and innovative actions were at a high level.	Medium	Metropolitan. Excellent facilities.	ICSEA >1000 Multicultural community. Strong sporting school.	This principal says his purpose is to obtain high level results and successful students generally, and through this, drive enrolments. It's about undertaking programs that will make a difference over time he says. Active in working with other principal colleagues on many levels; strong views about helping other schools to innovate.	Mapping student responses for remediation processes. A major innovation started with research-based evidence; working with University. Support around literacy to develop a particular local teaching and learning philosophy.
Principal W (female)	**LSLD school** Many students from non-English speaking backgrounds.	Large	Metropolitan. Average to poor facilities.	ICSEA < 950 Generally medium/lower socio-economic.	This principal has strong views of what the contemporary principal role should be. She sees education as being in a period of great disruption.	ATSI engagement and connection initiatives. An Integrated curriculum model for some years. A workforce capacity initiative. These need to all work together, she says.

Principal	School level/SBM involvement	School size [a]	Location	ICSEA and related information	Principal characteristics and/or some view of purpose	Innovations summary
Principal U (female)	**LSLD school** Large experienced staff. A favoured school in a middle class area.	Medium	Regional. Average facilities.	ICSEA > 1000 Medium socio-economic Anglo-Saxon background predominates.	This principal brings extensive life experiences including leadership in other areas of society to the role. She has been a principal for an extended period at her school and interacts with and often provides leadership for peers.	A collaborative approach based around executive leadership to deliver a creative, innovative, future focused school – a STEM focus is only part of this. Innovation at pedagogy and curriculum levels are all really important, she says.
Principal Z (female)	**LSLD school** Draws from a large area. Part of a group of schools working together. School has struggled in the past.	Large	Regional. Average to poor facilities.	ICSEA < 950 Significant welfare demands	Highly regarded by colleagues as a leader in educational ideas. Leads a school that initially exhibited many indicators of a learning community that was not travelling well but over a long period, has been working towards improving that.	Learners are offered inclusion and engagement; the focus is upon core curriculum via individual determination and is based on five pillars – writing, inquiry, collaboration, organisation and reading.

Note. [a] based on student numbers.

Responses to the First Interview

You might have thought that in an increasingly flexible environment that you have to bend the rules less, wouldn't you? But I'm not. I'm continuing to push the boundaries of the rules in order to become more flexible, in order to do things more locally. If you want innovation you are going to have to break the rules. (PY)

This study was undertaken in the general context of increasing SBM, and specifically, in the context of the NSW policy of LSLD, a major SBM system initiative ultimately intended to affect all school leaders in the NSW government sector. The eight principal participants provided in-depth information about their perceptions of the drivers and impediments to innovation at their schools. Their perceptions were comprehensive in scope, delving into complex, multifaceted, and practically oriented matters such as "managing up," minimising "blockages and irrelevancies," how the system and SPC was trying to facilitate principal development, and how bureaucratic interference could "transcend" the relationship between innovation and SBM, inter alia.

Question 1: What are your perceptions of the current drivers or impediments to change as you go about leading your school in an environment of increasing school based management?

SBM—the Emperor's got no clothes! This statement was repeated often by PS during the interviews. It was all the more poignant as an expression of the perceived shortfalls of the current system-wide reforms in NSW because it effectively captured the opinions expressed by five of the other principals interviewed. This statement was made with particular reference to SBM. These six principals believed that the current policy

on SBM in NSW public schools was constraining rather than delivering the promised site-based flexibility, although the specific details of how it impacted the particular situation of each principal varied.

> The Department has a range of new strategies in place, reforms, call it what you will, the reality is the "Emperor's got no clothes." Lots and lots of reforms, that transfer into a lot of work for schools. (PS)

PS was adamant that the promised flexibility/freedom/autonomy had not been delivered. Similarly, PV stated that SBM had not impacted his innovations in any perceptible way, nor had it allowed him to do more with his school. Due to new hierarchical structures critical relationships with decision makers were faltering and "committees" ruled too many operational matters. Often the systems being put in place were perceived by PV to work against each other in unhelpful and contradictory ways. PV believed that accountability had reached ridiculous levels, stating that there was excessive accountability on everything, and particularly at the financial level. He complained that everything was monitored so that "you're spending hours and hours on accountability management tasks and less and less time is available to focus on the sorts of things that really matter for your school" (PV).

PV stated that he saw the government as lacking the courage to actually give principals genuine autonomy. He questioned if it was realistic to expect genuine reform like SBM in the current policy environment. In his view, it was because principals were too restricted and handcuffed by the system. In a "legitimate" SBM environment PV believed that he would have far more flexibility with staffing. As such, there would be some positions that he would abandon to allow for the funding of important projects. He indicated that the system only seemed to care about the "trained monkey stuff." It's not about teaching and learning innovation he said. If you're going to be increasingly

autonomous you're going to do things that are in the best interest of your school, then you are going to make some decisions that annoy some people. In essence, he argued that you cannot be innovative and "worry about what everybody thinks. I don't feel like I've got any more autonomy than I had 15 years ago to be blunt with you" (PV).

In comments that reinforced some of PV's ideas, PY discussed what he called "one-size-fits-all" as a failed organisational concept:

> "One-size-fits-all" is precisely the opposite of what we want with school-based management: we want some flexibility! So, we have these silly people, processes, practices, products…. I still don't quite know which thing fits in which box. What I want is: What's your target? What are the strategies you're going to use to deliver that and what are the indicators that you're going to look for to determine if it is successful?… these are the powerful processes that should be taking place in planning, not the rigid confinement. Does that material go in the "people box" or the "process box"? It's not school-based management! It's system-constricted management with the occasional little—I don't know— offering to make you think that you're being more flexible. What I guess I'm saying is the drivers of change are any opportunities to be flexible. (PY)

A centralised mentality. Four of the principals identified problems with what they perceived as a centralised governance mentality in NSW, a mindset that effectively prevented the significant exercise of local freedom and flexibility. These principals challenged the notion that there was increasing SBM, which in this sense meant a measure of genuine autonomy. PT referred to the current policy milieu as "school-delivered management [in which] the actual flexibility [available] is not what might be

portrayed." He did not feel principals really had a great deal of say in the management

goals and policies that were delivered by the system.

Two of the principals questioned the concept of universal approaches to reform.

Their argument appeared to be that system-wide reform dictated both system-wide

policy and compliance. PS's view was that it was not just the policy per se but the short-

sightedness of its uniform implementation that had proved to be so constraining. The

focal idea contributed by PS (and to a lesser extent by PT) was that the system's "one-

size-fits-all" approach effectively hamstrung all the early adopters, innovators, and

schools who were actually moving forward:

> Now that the union is supporting it, people are saying, "This [having supervisors
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> in classrooms] is a great change! This is positive!" Yes, that's fine for some
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> schools, but the problem is when "one-size-fits-all" it ignores schools that may
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> be, in the case of this school, 10 to 12 years in front! I'd be happy if they just
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> gave me the money and went completely away. (PS)

Both PS and PT suggested that in terms of securing change, there was a lack of

will embedded in the DEC's one-size-fits-all mentality. There was also a lack of

understanding about change processes. The view was put that senior leadership of the

Department/Government was developing in a way that could negatively affect school

operations going forward. The view was that there was little understanding by some

senior officers of the daily complexities of school operations. PS made the following

observation about system-wide reforms: "you'd really have to question how successful

any of them are; in fact in many cases, they actually become the impediment to

change."

PX's view was that there were too many reforms. He pointed to the deterioration

of district- and system-level support that he believed was due to staffing reductions in

non-school based positions. Loss of support staff and excessive pressure for reform increased the challenges for principals who were trying to implement reforms, and this was concomitant with what he perceived as constantly changing expectations by the system and supervisors. "What I have experienced is that making decisions is easy; having the confidence to double check it with a superior is more difficult" (PX).

Support for SBM reforms. An exception to the predominantly negative views about the practical realities of NSW SBM policy was expressed by PU. PU supported the current reforms stating that SBM, as currently configured, had assisted innovation. It had made it easier or "at least more possible" because with some financial and HR decisions available at the local level, she was in a position to "structure the school," particularly the executive, to make things happen. Particularly pertinent was her view that SBM may be seen as a "non-bean counter" approach and had the potential to be a really effective tool. However, she qualified her view by stating that you still needed good processes and systems in place to understand the total educational picture because "you don't know what you don't know." She commented:

> If you've got money you can buy time, you can make that right decision at the
> local level, you can actually make innovation happen because you can structure
> the school to suit. Without disadvantaging the learning outcomes of the whole
> group, you can make things happen. (PU)

PZ provided a more neutral view of SBM implementation, discussing the need for both drivers and "enablers" for obtaining tangible reform. She felt there had been "debacles" during the rollout of the LSLD initiatives. While on the one hand increased SBM had allowed her to do some things she was previously unable to do, she said that the number of reforms that principals were currently experiencing was isolating due to

the sheer amount of work that had to be done. More specifically, she explained that there were only so many hours available for work and there were only so many things that anyone could achieve in a given time frame.

> That's the thing which has come through with my experience as a leader of schools, my reflections as the leader of schools: how there is constantly need for improvement of schools and improvement of [their] efficacy across the board. (PZ)

Nevertheless, she believed that SBM had allowed schools to go "a little bit deeper" in terms of getting things to happen locally, and said that this was because it enabled her to have more control of the money. Her view was that the money and flexibility offered by being an LSLD helped principals. However, this was only the case once they "had their drivers in place" and this appeared to be a statement about local issues driving reform. She also noted that you had to have your "enablers" in place to make sure things were actually going to happen, and that it was about understanding what was happening in your environment and seeing ways to improve.

PX spoke about the importance of clarity in planning and the requirement to financially support plans. He posited that "if you cannot get your message across in one page then you are failing." He also observed that one page does not allow for vast numbers of system policies to be incorporated. Consequently, from his perspective this pointed to the need for most finance matters to be locally controlled. He commented that "the misinterpretation of Local Schools Local Decisions is well… you've got this money and you can use it for whatever you want, but you can't!" He commented that schools were getting "70% more funding but were paying 90% more bills." He saw too much of the local expenditure as not being that local at all; rather, it was system-

mandated expenditure. For effective implementation of planning you needed genuine financial flexibility.

A networked view of innovation. An alternative view was offered by PW, who viewed her role as part of a broader organisational network. In some ways, PW considered that SBM was already working. For instance, she noted that in curriculum design and implementation, principals have actually had significant levels of control, and this was "thanks to the BOSTES [Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards] approaches for overseeing curriculum." BOSTES might set the syllabuses that schools have to teach, but not how schools have to deliver it she said. However, she recognised a potential issue because flexibility over curriculum delivery can "terrify" some senior DoE people who want more control.

PW indicated that at times the system unintentionally gets it wrong even when the intention was laudable. She used the example of the Learning Management and Business Reform (LMBR) software that the system had been "rolling out" for some years to assist schools with IT management. She saw this software as a control rather than a helpful planning and management tool, yet acknowledged that the latter may well have played a genuine part of the motivation for its development. To her, LMBR was a cogent example of myopic system thinking. Another example of what PW saw as unintentional incompetence was in assets delivery, which she clearly to be ineffective: "Why would you build a new school in the 21st century that looks like a 1960s school?"

In terms of the frequent, often mundane procedural/compliance matters reported by other principals, PW commented that she did not want to do too much of that kind of work. She cited as examples, the "legal stuff" or "doing staff recruitment from scratch", and referred to the lengthy, heavily documented approaches to DoE recruitment. In her view, these were things the bureaucracy should undertake, rather than devolve to

schools. From a school's point of view the problem was the bureaucratic procedures not the need for a school to have a say in who was appointed. PW commented that the strength of the bureaucracy lay in its capacity to simultaneously manage a range of system level requirements. Therefore, the notion that there are functions that central organisations perform and perform well was, in her opinion, a strength that should be pursued. It was her view that what central organisations should be doing must be thought through carefully, yet that did not seem to happen. In terms of SBM, the system's policies and statements implied that schools would have more control over money, but she did not agree. She viewed the system's structure as an impediment to genuine SBM and offered an alternative:

> Principals should think of themselves more like a franchise organisation…more like a network, and we recognise that there would be some common things that we had to have in play, but a lot of the rest could just be left to the franchisee to make happen. If you bugger up the system, you bugger up everybody. (PW)

She saw the NSW system's current structure as leading to problems that one might expect from a very large, non-franchised, federated organisation. These problems led to tensions:

> The tension around being part of a large bureaucracy, because the counter-tension is that in bureaucracies there's risk aversion, need for control, procedure systems, and lots and lots and lots and lots of paperwork. And in my opinion, that's the tension of school-based management. (PW)

PW said that whilst SBM offered potential as an effective change tool, it should not be forgotten that schools still needed certainty. That is, they do not need constant disruption, further suggesting that the system tended to entrench disruptive processes.

Broadly summarising, she was of the belief that, "I guess what my personal view would be, my own perception would be; you cannot allow the impediments to stop you from getting to where the students need to be."

Drivers and beliefs. When discussing drivers that might assist principals, and the issues that might impede them, PX listed positive drivers that were clearly local, such as staff and student morale. He saw crucial impediments as being matters that resulted in a lack of opportunity for staff to experience new ways of approaching their work. In terms of SBM, he saw the issues of drivers and impediments as revolving around a principal's capacity, and he felt that being a responsible leader was contingent upon "owning" the processes of change.

Concomitant with this, PY saw the current settings of the system as restricting her capacity to achieve all that could be achieved for her students. She referred often to "one-size-fits-all" approaches, describing some of the system support structures, particularly around school planning, as "juvenile," and observed that "they don't know how to roll out big reforms."

PW was adamant that the NSW education system struggles with reform processes. The implication was that the system might see its support structures as positive drivers, but principals often did not agree. Commenting on perceived impediments, PY believed that the LSLD policy, while theoretically being about flexibility, was actually more about responsibility and accountability at the local level. Specifically, she described the policy as "a bit wimpy, a bit sad."

PZ also acknowledged the impact of impediments and noted that:

If you understand the enablers and the drivers and the impediments, and have enough experience, then you kind of transcend SBM; that is, you know how to

get around some of the impediments. (PZ) PZ said that courage, knowledge, and experience were all required to deal with the pace of reform.

Staffing inflexibility. An important issue for PY was the "continuing lack of staffing flexibility available for principals;" she indicated that this confined her as a school leader; she was of the view that it was only possible to do great projects if she had the right staff. Nevertheless, she did not perceive the current levels of "so-called" SBM as an impediment because "really, if you are able enough, you'll be bending the rules to do what you need to do." PY expressed no particular view of drivers for change (except flexibility). Importantly, she said:

You would have thought in an increasingly flexible environment that you have to bend the rules less, wouldn't you? But I'm not. I'm continuing to push the boundaries of the rules in order to become more flexible, in order to do things more locally. If you want innovation you are going to have to break the rules. (PY)

PT also commented about bending the rules, referring to this as the "art of management," particularly as this related to staffing and the system's human resource policies. He saw designing staffing requirements, and establishing at least some level of local HR control, as being at the heart of the skill set of effective principals. This skill set included the crucial ability, developed over many years, to manipulate a complex, formula-driven, often union-influenced HR system. PU put this simply, saying that you have to have the "right people," but PV went further. PV indicated that to understand what is actually needed in staffing, you have to have a window to the "bigger picture" of relevant educational issues such as a deep understanding of your school's learning community. He said:

It's increasingly obvious to me that for a principal to legitimately have success in their school community, they have to have a very clear understanding of the requirements of that community and a deep knowledge of the community itself. (PV)

Question 2: What theoretical and practical approaches are you using to design, implement, and maintain innovations in your school? Could you describe the innovation you currently see as most important at your school?

The favoured approaches are possible, practical, and pragmatic. To support their innovation efforts, all of the participating principals referred to planning and/or to the use of data. Pertaining to establishing innovations at their school, the concepts they discussed were derived from a particular experience, successful programs, reading, or another knowledgeable person. Data was considered very important, with four of the participating principals working—to one extent or another—on specific innovations with a university partner. For example, PV and PW had built long-term specific programs from research intervention supported by a university, and these were designed to meet specific problems relating to poor student outcomes. All participant statements referred to local reform and innovation success as requiring principals who were practical and pragmatic. The "art of the possible" seemed to be an important talent for a principal to have. PW said that her "theoretical approach is to work from purpose, to design processes to go for products and practices; that is really useful." While participants did engage with research-based or theoretical approaches when considering the design and implementation of innovations, during discussion they all emphasised

the importance of pragmatism, localism, and views on "what mattered" that had been built on experience. Networking with colleagues was also considered important.

PU said that he did not have particular research driving his decisions and innovations. PT believed it was the informal structures based around effective people, combined with personal capacity and experience as a school leader that allowed for successful local innovation. PZ said that when considering an innovation, you have to ask, "What's going to be the difference if this goes ahead and why is it going to matter to the students?" PY commented that designing, implementing, and maintaining innovation in schools centred on a practical approach to need, but also that having cost-effective programs and local flexibility were very important.

Deep transformation innovations. Two principals who had been innovating by using laptop computers in every lesson, commented that, as a result of this innovation, their school's data had been showing increased student test results across a range of measures. However, maintaining this innovation rapidly became problematic when the NSW Government decided that they would not pay the salaries of the technical services officers who originally supported the technology reforms in schools. Currently schools pay for specialist IT staff to support computer use in learning, an intensive cost for schools because of the sophistication of the work. Not surprisingly, they believed that such practical realities greatly impact innovation. Further emphasising the practical, PZ described her school's innovation as follows:

> The innovation that we've been looking at has been one of core curriculum advancement via individual determination and it's pretty much based on five pillars. It has writing, inquiry, collaboration, organisation, and reading, and we're talking about writing for understanding as well as strengthening and producing new knowledge. (PZ)

She went on to explain that these programs cannot be about "busy stuff." Instead, it is focussed, practical efforts that lift results. This personalised curriculum work was based on a program that has been widely used in the United States, and was designed to hold students accountable to high standards but also provide academic and social support. It targeted those students of middle ability who were "coasting" through school. Data showed that the school had moved its outcomes from 70% of students below Band 4 (of the possible 6) in the HSC[1] to about 80% at or above Band 4. She saw this as an impressive achievement that arose from local innovation.

University expertise and data. PV noted that his major innovation was related to research-based evidence from a literacy project that was being delivered at his school with strong involvement from a university. The university team came in and worked with staff, interviewed students and parents, and talked to teachers. This research was used to develop a local teaching and learning philosophy and programs specifically designed for the school. Teachers were not using the skills needed by their student cohort, so the university staff worked on an explicit framework to encourage staff to step out of their comfort zone and to teach using such skills. Many years after its inception this work has continued to evolve and, at the time of writing, was at stage "Project 2.0". PV indicated that he was now considering ways in which particular teaching and learning skills from the project could be aligned with both the NSW professional teaching standards and with curriculum planning.

PW who demands that every student in her school has a personalised learning plan, ensures that there are intensive programs for various groups in the school to support such plans. In her view, both local- and system-level data were crucial matters

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[1] Higher School Certificate, the highest educational award in New South Wales schools. In any subject, there are 6 bands of performance, with band 6 at the top.

for designing school innovation. She commented that "here, specialist teachers track quarterly the improvements students are making so that means we are tracking a lot of data, we're talking to students about what would work better for them." In summary, her innovation is about a "capability" curriculum and giving students specific skills. She said she was constantly thinking about where the world and the job market was heading, and using personalised learning innovation to hopefully meet some of her students' future needs. Whilst noting that "the personalised learning approach is about working with students," she highlighted that "it's also about working with the adults, working with everybody around the data."

Continuing this concept of locating in-school innovation within a "broader picture" of societal change, PU described her innovation as a collaborative approach that was based around executive leadership to deliver a creative, innovative, future-focussed school. A STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths) focus was part of this work. She commented:

> Innovation at the faculty and at the pedagogy and curriculum levels are all really important. Consider Hattie's work about where you get the biggest impact and it's in the classroom with teachers. We particularly looked at feedback, feedback to students—the quality of the feedback to students and the quality of the feedback to staff. Through professional learning we are trying to get everybody to look at what 21st century learning will look like: "What does it look like in your classroom? Are you doing it? What's the impact?" You should get eclectic and you need to think a lot [as a principal]. I'm not a purist in terms of whose research drives what I do but I like to think that something does. (PU)

A favoured innovation—STEM. PU, PS, PW, and PX all used a STEM focus within their innovations. PS noted that his school had recently set up STEM classes as

elective options with age-flexible entry. He viewed technology as a major driver of innovation at his school; his persistence and willingness to resource programs locally had seen the expansion of their bring-your-own-device efforts (BYOD).

PW explained that for some time her school has had university involvement, particularly for their relatively recent STEM initiatives. Their partner university was providing resources—in the form of staff and even some money—to help with the development of professional practice mentors in a new STEM program focussed on staff as well as curriculum development.

PX had decided to make STEM the major focus of his school. He said his approach to innovation represented a whole-of-school engagement, and that he had moved away from conceptualising STEM as an "add on." He was in the process of designing the total project and its implementation from a local perspective. Yet in terms of getting this new direction underway, he commented on the following barriers:

> We had a list of things holding us back [from our STEM innovations], which were only one-word problems, and a list of things allowing us to move forward. So, the idea of the vision statement is [that] they [the one-word problems on the first list] are the weights; they hold us back, ignore them! What is going to lift us? It [the second list] came down to staff and student morale, quality teaching, location, and curriculum. (PX)

PX's school enrolment is currently low. Until recently, his school had not been viewed positively by the local community. In his view, it was thus a significant advantage to take the school in an entirely new direction. Concomitant with this, the STEM project also involved local primary schools with a plan for primary students to be taught STEM subjects at the high school.

Question 3: How do you use evidence? What data sources and educational theories are you using to identify, monitor, and evaluate your efforts to make the changes you require?

Data is the key driver of innovation. It was clear from statements by all eight of the participating principals that data and other forms of evidence, including local information from a number of sources, were crucial to ascertain the overall directions and required innovations for a given school. For example, PY commented that you need plenty of "on-the-ground data, plenty of anecdotal stuff; there'll be plenty of hard data decisions that must be made." Aside from this common agreement around the importance of data, there was some divergence among participants as to what and who mattered in terms of identifying, monitoring, and evaluating innovation efforts. Given the extent to which school contexts differ, some divergence was expected. Perhaps the best way to view this matter would be to emphasise that each participant was very much "their own person." As experienced practitioners, over the years, they had built up a portfolio of people and processes that they believed would work for them and work for their school's particular circumstances.

PW said that there was a broad resistance to innovation in NSW public education but did not specify exactly how this resistance manifested itself. As a practical foundation for good decision-making, PW observed that an obsession with data was helpful. She saw knowledge of a full range of data as a driver of change; principals with good local data, or those with quality information, would have a lot of "power" because the system-supplied data was at times too general or did not connect with local needs. She said that system-level data was still important but not always helpful, and she implied it might contain bias. She commented that political interference was an ever-present threat to best practice from a principal's point of view and that

interference may be forceful or subtle. It could force principals to undertake changes that may not be in the best interests of their school. Importantly, she observed that often this interference was embedded within systems of compliance. She indicated that the heart of the problem was people who held quite senior positions in DEC, and who simply did not understand many of the key fundamentals of the work that was done in leading schools. She said this was particularly the case around subject discourses, and gave the specific example of what it actually entails to get an HSC Band 5 or Band 6 for a particular student. She viewed the many system requirements to obtain and measure educational outcomes, in respect of certain mandated policies, as myopic. She commented that given the challenges of a school like hers, such a focus was counterproductive.

Similarly, PU stressed the importance of a full range of quality data. She described data as "a driver of innovation" and like PW pointed to the system's compliance requirements as being an impediment to setting local goals. PU said increasing workload and the pace of change was affecting the capacity of principals to respond to locally needed reforms. Specifically, she said too many simultaneous reforms were an impediment to local innovation:

> Changes to student well-being policy, assessment reporting protocols, BOSTES requirements, registration requirements, external validation, implementing the system-designed school excellence framework, a new school planning model including surveying parents, understanding and using all the data that is harvested through the business intelligence system [a powerful tool] it all takes time. Why should you report on, say Aboriginal student data, if you're consistently getting improvement? (PU)

PV commented that the data that mainly drives ongoing innovation in his school was his HSC results. For this principal, there are important support groups in the DoE that enable a deeper exploration of such data, and even assist with designing ways to improve student outcomes as a result of it. PV claimed that his school monitored HSC results in detail and so could confirm whether or not students were improving across the full spectrum of student ability. The system's High Performance and Leadership Unit provided ideas for improvement and effective monitoring, but he commented that the mindset for improvement needed to be local. He said that the recent excellence framework from the same unit was "a great way for you to legitimately go through and check your evidence, check that your school is where it should be in terms of developing in the correct areas."

PX commented that he was looking at data on a daily basis. PZ stated that it is vital for any principal trying to improve a learning situation to do so from an understanding of "where they [staff and students are] at." To achieve such improvements, she noted that a principal needed a high level of organisational ability:

> Underlying the ability to make the changes you might require is organisational ability, basic stuff perhaps, but it's more than just having things neat and tidy. It's about organising information but it's also about organising your thoughts. All this means that it takes constant modification to keep innovations on track; it's challenging to keep reforms going. (PZ)

Implementing and sustaining innovation is about people. PU indicated that along with data, having the right people was a major driver of positive change. PS made the same point and discussed the value of mentoring. He said he began his leadership career as deputy principal to someone he described as a "principal legend." This person designed systems of improvement that were based around a range of data long before

that became the norm, and the lessons learned from this experienced principal had helped him to successfully engage with his own school's many challenges. PT focussed on the present, stating that there were individuals among his principal colleagues, and certain individuals who worked at both system and district levels, who could and did support principals trying to innovate, and who could assist with the pragmatic type of data that helped you be sure of your innovation direction. PX said his efforts towards innovative practice were supported by his more experienced colleagues, but also that he worked with a range of other inputs, such as people from his local university or even the local Apple store. He said that his current professional relationships had been an invaluable aid to his school's performance.

Theory as background. For PY, designing and implementing change was less about educational theory and more about fully understanding the context and the needs of the school's staff and students. However, there was a theoretical basis to her thinking. She said:

> We are relying quite a lot on Hattie and his evidence-based analysis of what is or is not happening in schools. We are engaging in about $60,000 worth of professional learning on Hattie and that looks like [it will be] providing the agenda for probably the next three years. (PY)

Elaborating further, she said that collaboration and learning from experts like Hattie, as well as learning from other principals, had moved her school's work towards observations in the classroom and guided teaching efficiency reviews. While PX commented that generally he was not so much about educational theories as about listening and then owning what he had decided to do, he said that he did value Bloom's taxonomy in terms of understanding learning. He felt that engaging with the taxonomy let the staff understand more about learning as a concept, and that the real gain in

discussing theories was that it enabled staff to see how it was possible for them to

"jump in" with their teaching at any level, depending upon their students'

circumstances.

It seemed that for most participants, reflecting upon and understanding

applicable educational research was of some practical use. However, it appeared that

this aspect of day-to-day principal work was highly individual and related to the

principal's situation. For example, PZ claimed that at various stages she was influenced

by people who put forward educational ideas, processes, and theories, but she also

observed that the impact on practice was less about theory and more about individual

relationships, about how you saw yourself as a leader and as potentially becoming a

vehicle for applying educational ideas.

Question 4: For the innovation(s) here at your school, do you feel that the district and system initiatives are drivers or impediments to you sustaining innovation?

A lack of coherence. This question was underpinned by Fullan's (2010) tri-

level proposition. The principals in this study supported the idea that a coherent

approach by system, districts, and schools can make educational change easier and more

effective. The practical reality they portrayed was one in which a coherent approach was

missing from their organisation's efforts. Six of the principals considered that the

current district (area) structure, including the role of the Public Schools Directors that

led the areas, did not support innovative practice in schools. The two other principals

recognised that in their prescribed roles, these directors faced their own supervisory

constraints. All eight principals suggested that the highly centralised nature of the NSW

system was not supportive of site-based innovation. PY believed that there was little

synergy or collaborative effort in the sense of a tri-level approach to reform. PS said the level of coherence in terms of system, district, and schools working together was highly variable; in his case, the district leadership did not impact his innovations at all and that "the level of support that is provided [by the system] in teaching and learning and in curriculum is nil."

PT observed that the current DoE structure was inferior to its previous structures because much of the policy force now rested with "a narrow group at the top who have not been able to communicate well with the large NSW system and build assurance and confidence." This was made worse by the current pace of change. PZ saw "a lot of disjointed things happening."

PW, who approached the issue from an enabling perspective, commented that "the tri-level system is broken." She noted that the NSW system had had a genuinely coherent model when districts were the crucial element of school support, but a great deal was then lost as regions became powerful and when these districts were essentially abandoned for "areas."

> The Public Schools Directors spend an enormous amount of time still doing things that they shouldn't be doing, like answering ministerial letters and dealing with really low level administrative work with a staff that's about a quarter of the size that they need. (PW)

She added that much of the "current lower cost structure" (referring to one justification for SBM initiatives) was supposedly about giving more money to schools to use flexibly, but that this was simply not true. Her fundamental view was that the current hierarchical structure in NSW education did not work well and it was not having any particular impact in terms of the innovations she was undertaking in her school. PW

believed that principals needed to find their "own networks, their own partnerships" if they wanted to obtain the best possible outcomes for their students.

PV commented that the sheer size of the NSW system impacted on a principal's capacity to be effective. A strong believer in assisting other public schools to succeed in innovative practice, he reported that there had been no system or area recognition of the supportive work schools were doing for each other. He said, "You know what myself and my colleagues have done? We've decided to just help each other." In his view, an effective model was one where practicing principals connected to innovation through meetings, SPC conferences, and professional learning initiatives. He stated that a system of sharing was more sustainable and more highly valued by principals than the Public Education Director's operations or the system's extensive list of reforms. In summary, he observed that the district or area level was not having a significant impact on school site innovation.

Similarly, PS said he felt disconnected from the larger structures of the system and his local area; his support revolved more around a network of particularly capable and trusted people, both principals and certain DoE personnel. PU said that principal meetings were where focussed solutions that engendered professional learning and the sharing of good practice could be found.

Blockages and irrelevances. In PT's view, due to the centralised nature and size of the NSW structure, barriers were created for principals who were trying to innovate. As an example, he referred to the model of current district/area operation as being "sabotaged and hijacked" by a system that was nervous of genuine local control. He observed that the local Public Education Director's role was supposed to primarily be about creating links and liaisons and supporting reform, but that this did not happen. In the participant group, the main exception to views such as this was expressed by PU.

She took a more neutral view that her local area, led by the Public Schools Director, did not "thwart" innovation but she did note that "it doesn't offer a great deal of direct help either," adding that "that's no reflection on the quality of the Public Schools Directors."

Roles change: People don't. PZ discussed recent changes to the structure of her district system. She indicated that the most recent reshuffle had changed the supervisory roles and what districts (or areas) were supposed to achieve within the overall system. She perceived this as challenging because the people working externally to her school had stayed the same, meaning these people had to adapt to change and to new roles, while others would have struggled to step away from their previous roles. In short, this meant that principals needed to do a lot of "managing up." Going further, she said district level support was "not necessarily around big picture stuff," but was too often about the minutia of management. "It seems that each of the system reforms we are trying to manage at the moment, might be strong as an entity, but what's the bigger picture?"

Similarly, PX expressed the view that at a district level, the senior officers change so often that they do not know the nuances of each community they are supposed to support, but, they pursue with alacrity whether a given policy has been implemented. He said that it is principals who have to put policies in place, "they have to tweak them this way or that, otherwise, it wouldn't work." For this principal, it was clear that context and directions for improvement combined to make a local mix of meaningful actions towards innovative practice. He strongly took the view that this process should be as unfettered by external forces as possible.

PZ referred to compliance requirements as an example of practices that should be coherent across the organisation but often were not. "I think one of the things that people have held out hope for would be that the 'silos' within the Department [for

example the staffing, assets, or finance groups] would be lessened. I think it's actually gotten stronger," she said, referring to her view that the management areas of the system do not work well together; that is, collaboration and coherence are not happening, which in turn "saps principals' energies" and time and becomes an impediment to innovation.

PY said system and district approaches, and even some of the SPC initiatives, had generated a messy, uncertain situation. She said that there were "lots of reforms and it's very grey and swampy but for the beginning of change, that's okay." However, she believed that there was little understanding among the DEC's officers about how to implement school level change. At the district level, she saw her Public Schools Director as "having nothing to do with any kind of reform, idea, or innovation; they manage rubbish, complaints." She did not believe that district leaders had a significant impact on school-based "anything." She added, "I would go to a colleague before I will go to anyone else because we're on the ground and we know what's happening."

Question 5: Have you changed or modified your leadership practice because of the increasing SBM environment, or because of the drivers and impediments you have described?

SBM is not the major developmental influence. As a group, the participating principals did not engage as deeply with the concept of leadership development or leadership modification as they had engaged with the other Phase 1 interview questions. This may be because of a possible disconnect between the ideals of what leadership is and how it should operate, and the reality of their lived experience as school leaders. The key causes of this disconnect were seen to be system policies and expectations, supervisory practices, and compliance requirements. None saw SBM as the major developmental influence for their leadership because, for these principals, it seemed that

leadership modification mainly came from a dynamic that could best be described as "necessity built on capacity."

Leadership practice is personal, morally grounded, local, and imperative. In PY's statements, there was no particular indication that she had changed her leadership practice because of the (reportedly) increasing SBM environment. She indicated that there were processes you could use to get around the impediments that in her view the system had generated. She talked about the "line in the sand and how far I'm prepared to go" in the sense that she was doing what she believed she should do to innovate in her school. Yet she also recognised there were limits to how far a principal could go in overcoming unreasonable policies, and that this might come at significant personal cost in terms of her supervisor's opinion of her efficiency and career standing. Notwithstanding her concerns, she said that she would continue to "break the rules" as needed but hopefully, without crossing into dangerous territory.

PX did not explicitly discuss leadership modification and development as it related to SBM, but instead made distinctive statements about the principal's role in NSW schools. He implied that self-understanding can lead to the mutual development of both leader and staff. He said that he was confident in his own professional development processes and completely focussed upon the transformations he was seeking for his school. He observed:

> I've got a different idea of where I am now. I'm quite comfortable in managing, but I want to get back into the classroom. I can't, so my job is to make sure whoever *is* in the classroom has absolutely everything they need to do their job. It's basically…let's look at the staff and support the staff entirely in building themselves up. That's one step; the next thing is looking at the community. (PX)

Context, supervision, and management capacity. PU said that as a starting point for leadership development, principals needed to be effective local managers, but that this was not really a SBM issue:

It is about making the most of your context; it is about consulting the academic literature and finding the fits in that that suit you and suit the school. One example is Fullan's work on collaborative cultures. You grow as a leader by reading, but not necessarily through SBM. If you haven't got good processes and systems in place, you won't have the capacity to look outside. You can end up being buried in operational matters. (PU)

PS offered a more critical view of leadership development, relating this to system structure and capacity. He stated that a major problem with developing leadership practice in an increasing SBM environment was the lack of capacity among the Department's senior management group. He claimed that senior managers had little understanding of the day-to-day operation of schools and that, as a group, they could be best described as performing at a level of "outstanding mediocrity." On a positive note, he commented that the SPC provided an ideal forum for sharing, including forums for innovation discussion, and in that sense principals' leadership could be developed and modified. For him, it was not about SBM. He said he had to stay "nimble, adaptable" and find ways to work around the external impediments.

PW said her role was about providing structures so that her teachers understood that they could work smarter, not harder. She said her main priority was the development of a better professional culture in her school. PW had changed her leadership practice over time, but a crucial part of changing this had been to change the practice of her executive team. The SBM environment had not directly affected change;

yet her implication was that immersion in local changes had occurred in an environment of increasing SBM, and thus it had indirectly led to practice changes for her.

SBM can impact leadership development. The most positive response to the development or modification effects of SBM on a principals' leadership approaches was articulated by PZ. PZ stated that she had modified her leadership practice as a result of the increasing flexibility that accompanied SBM. As a LSLD school, she had experienced some system-sanctioned flexibility. However, because of SBM she had to manage "more things" and that helped her professional growth. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that the number of things that needed management still caused her difficulties. In that sense, she indicated that an SBM environment could also work against "leadership" development. For example, she was adamant that the system's promise of "red tape" reduction with SBM initiatives had not eventuated and that, if anything, "red tape has doubled."

PT provided a useful summary. He said that his job involved being able to:

Tailor and custom make the things that we do here to keep us improving. I can't do the generic "one-size-fits-all." I need to be able to be on that boundary and always need to be the one who's pushing the boundaries as much as possible. (PT)

He was adamant that if a principal wanted to get something done, to effectively implement innovations, they had to go "out on a limb." They needed to use their capacities, their ability to walk the fence, and their ability to make the right choices, as well as their knowledge, determination, and communication skills. He said in terms of principal development that this was far more important than any system-sanctioned SBM policy.

Individual Principals' Perceptions

This section provides a guide to unique participant issues that were identified as benefiting from further discourse with that participant. The unique matters described here represent only one principal's views but were deemed important enough to warrant further discussion as this might provide increased depth of information that would ultimately go towards answering the level 2 research questions. They are phrased below as generalised ideas, as simple questions and concepts, but in the second interview protocol, they were developed into a more formal questioning style and labelled as questions 5 and 6.

PU discussed a principal's capacity to make the "hard calls." PU talked about how you could be fundamentally data-driven and client-based and also about how you could drive initiatives with data and other evidence because you had been at a school as its principal for an extended period. Why does extended incumbency allow for such hard calls?

PZ discussed capacity building (in a principal), particularly, why this does not develop quickly. How can appropriate capacities be developed in an increasing SBM environment?

PY discussed the number of times principals need to "break the rules" in order to succeed at being innovative. What is the relationship between non-compliance and policy and the directions principals might be taking to obtain positive reform? That is, how do they use their "personal processes?"

PW said that for leaders to be effective, their major task was to address in-school cultural change. How might this relate to an increasing SBM environment? Why did the system have a limited understanding of how change happens in schools?

PX said that for a principal seeking innovation and educational quality, "you can't move forward unless you know what the kids, parents, and staff are thinking." Why is such knowledge so important? Does it particularly relate to schools that are experiencing performance pressures?

PT stated that a principal, in terms of successful innovation, required the personal drive to deliver change that was worthwhile. In the context of this discussion, he offered the term "the art of management." He said that this is what mattered, not waiting for or acquiescing to system-level initiatives or ticking boxes. Is it possible to define the "art of management"?

PS, regarding early adopters of innovation, was scathing about current bureaucratic processes, in particular what he referred to as the "one-size-fits-all" mentality of the DEC. He suggested that this factor, more than any other, caused problems for schools that were already successfully innovating. What was his reason for stating that people in senior Departmental positions failed to accept responsibility for the "disasters" their bureaucratic processes caused at school level?

PV discussed "legitimate autonomy" and in connection with this, "legitimate consequences for performance standards." He suggested that there could not be genuine reform in NSW with the current milieu of impediments, relating these to what he saw as insipid approaches to SBM. If performance standards are to be achieved, what does he believe is the relationship between principal autonomy and SBM?

Themes and Concepts from the Phase 1 Interviews

As previously mentioned, there were many professional commonalities among the eight participating principals; for example, they were all employees of the DoE and they were all experienced, although their school contexts were different. Essentially, the

independent variable for the participant group was a high level of leadership and management experience. There were also differences. Some of the principals performed leadership roles outside their own school, often through activity within the SPC, but also through local sport and community activities. Some were completely focussed on their own school and little else. One principal was in their 19th year in the principal's position. Interestingly, the least experienced principal viewed the drivers and impediments to his innovation efforts in much the same light as the most experienced principal, albeit with some differences in terms of examples and use of language.

It was noted from the interviews that participants' perspectives varied across a wide range of matters; sometimes this related to the actual subject matter being discussed, at other times, they differed in their emphasis. However, there was also significant commonality in their views, more than enough to develop the themes below. These themes were established from the participants' responses. They were established from the participants' responses (shown in italics throughout the results data above). Following the dot points there is a data-based discussion presented to provide additional explanatory detail.

Theme 1: A failure of system reform?

- Fairly or unfairly, seven of the eight participants said that the trend towards increasing SBM through NSW's LSLD policy was not delivering a great deal of increased local flexibility; "the Emperor's got no clothes!" commented PS. Unhelpful demands upon principals' time and energy were exacerbated by the constrained nature of the system's SBM initiatives and its "one-size-fits-all" mentality.

- The centralised system and its "one-size-fits-all" approaches had resulted in a tension between the system's expectations about the processes that could

increase local flexibility and the personal and professional factors driving school leaders in their day-to-day operations.

- SBM may be partially successful as a reform aimed at effective innovation and sustainable school improvement and, depending on the context and an individual principal's views and capacity, this could be an enabler for change.

Based on the participating principals' perceptions, as outlined above, it cannot be determined with any degree of certainty whether SBM was indeed "a failure of system reform." The data indicate equivocation as to whether SBM was in reality failing as a useful reform although generally speaking, participants felt that as a result of the controlling emphasis of system policy, that SBM was not providing the level of flexibility that they required. With respect to their views about the efficacy of SBM, the participants provided caveats, tangential concerns, and qualifications as to its failure, success, or usefulness. In short, it was not certain from the data gathered in this phase if SBM was a failure. What was clear is that the answer to the question was complex, contextually nested, and idiosyncratic; each principal conceptualised the question of failure (or success) from his or her own particular standpoint. For example, PW suggested that moving forward would require a radical change towards a franchise system, where schools are part of a network but not part of the traditional control structure. She expressed the unequivocal view that SBM policy enacted within the current structure could not succeed.

Seven of the eight principals perceived impediments to school-level innovation that resided within the system, its structures and its policies. There were tensions between being able to make decisions locally and a system that had retained a significant level of centralised control, ending in a balance of power that suited government ministers and DoE senior officers. The themes raised by the eight principals

in this study in terms of SBM and greater local autonomy generally point to the need to examine purpose; if the purpose of the SBM reform is to obtain improvements for students, then all participants agree that is not happening, certainly not to the greatest extent possible. In this regard, the questions for the second set of interviews were designed to provide a lens that would enable a deeper understanding of such matters.

Although a variety of terms were used, there was a consistent view that a clever, experienced, determined, even courageous principal could find ways to circumvent impediments that might otherwise work against local innovation. Six participants posited that the system's senior officers, responsible for supervision and compliance, were consuming valuable and finite energy from principals, the people who should be the leading change agents in the schools. Notwithstanding, all eight principals acknowledged in different ways that there were people, institutions, and supportive groups in the system who genuinely tried to make a difference for them but that these positive drivers varied to a great extent.

Theme 2: Excessive system reforms, policies, inefficiencies, mandated yet often irrelevant actions—all these impede innovation and best possible outcomes

- Too many simultaneous reforms and too many unworkable policies. The system is too large.
- The high number of external constraints and compliance requirements were an impediment to site-based innovation, and this was due to the time and energy they consumed. Such requirements generated an excessive workload that could be mindless, alienating, mundane, and time consuming. In terms of the processes that mattered locally, they were also unproductive.

- Lack of understanding about day-to-day school operations by senior officers and government led to poorly designed system structures and damaging managerial interference.

- System-level accountabilities could be both pointless and irrelevant or helpful and focussed but this depended on context, on the individuals involved, and local requirements.

In this Phase 1 data, the power of external constraints to at times negatively impact on what principals could and could not achieve was constantly reiterated as a theme. For example, four principals were directly critical of a relatively new IT based finance management system called LMBR (Local Management and Business Reform) which was mandatory and, in their opinion, difficult to use. They felt it worked against them, preventing them from being entrepreneurial or developing systems that better suited their local contexts.

Another area of concern was the rigidity of school staffing processes. It was generally acknowledged by participants that there had been improvements in this area, but having the right people for a given context, and the flexibility (as well as sufficient funds) to employ someone when that employee was most needed, remained very problematic.

Theme 3: The principal's capacity to respond as this relates to the lack of effective support structures, management processes, linkages, and context

- More so than other factors, successful innovation and reform at a school level were a reflection of principal experience and capacity.

- Principals' responses regarding opportunities for school success were biased towards possible, practical, and pragmatic solutions and these solutions tended

to be underpinned by the need to manipulate the policies, processes, initiatives, people, and formulas of the system.

- Principals believed they needed to "manage up" to minimise the "blockages and irrelevancies" that they were constantly experiencing.

This theme indicted that, for these principals, obtaining and sustaining innovation was less about system-authorised SBM, and more about their capacity to lead and respond to a range of complex pressures and scenarios, while still securing the outcomes they were seeking. While on the one hand SBM had allowed some participants to do things that they were previously unable to do, the general level of reforms that principals were currently experiencing resulted in an increase in the amount of "make-work" that had to be completed and, consequently, a heightened sense of isolation.

Sometimes it appeared that the four LSLD principal participants, despite having more discretionary money and HR control than their colleagues, found that the extra funds assisted local reform and innovation only "at the margins." The small amount of additional funding for their schools did not make a wholesale difference, but it did help in particular circumstances, such as allowing a few context specific programs to be established.

Theme 4: Dealing with uncertainty

- Flexibilities that could be enabled by increasing SBM are often in practice reduced by a range of matters that were uncontrollable at the principal level.

- Too many system and district accountabilities were irrelevant to school improvement (although some were helpful), while constantly changing

expectations about what was required added to a generally equivocal view of current accountability processes.

- More reforms were always being planned, discussed, and applied to schools and participants said this at times prevailed over sound local planning as well as existing and effective in-school policies and procedures.

- Staffing inflexibility worked against innovation.

All of the principals reported that obtaining progress towards local need was often about how well one could deal productively with all the "noise" around the ongoing uncertainty that continued to be generated by the system.

Theme 5: Knowing your context, relevant data, applicable research concepts, and having flexible resources and a willingness to change direction as required; these matters drive innovation to a greater extent than any system-derived SBM reform

- Effectively using and manipulating both system and school resources (including personnel) to suit local purpose was crucial to designing and sustaining innovation.

- A principal's capacity, his or her personal educational positioning and strengths, when combined with the "right" data, may lead to effective, sustainable, and contextually appropriate innovations. University assistance in reform journeys was common.

One principal clearly articulated three crucial elements for successful innovation: having the right people, sufficient discretionary funds, and a range of useful data. In this respect, there were positive views about some DoE support groups and senior people leading units of the DoE support structures (three participants cited the High Performance and Leadership Unit as an example of this) that specifically provided

pragmatic and useful support and assisted principals to achieve innovations and improved student outcomes. One participant pointed out that there were individuals among his principal colleagues, and certain people who worked at both system and district levels, who had the requisite skills and attitudes to strongly support principals who were attempting to innovate. Unfortunately, he said, this was not a common phenomenon.

Many people might think that by understanding your context, getting trusted help, and then using all the data and applicable research that could be gathered would lead to success, but according to these eight principals, this was not the case; successful outcomes were not so easily achieved. There was general consensus that the belief in anything otherwise was derived from a naïve view of school operations. The "real story," in their opinion, involved principals negotiating the many constraints, the inherent lack of collaboration and coherence across the organisation, excessive compliance regimes, as well as the ambiguities and uncertainties that inhabited daily operations.

Theme 6: Personal leadership capacities and SBM

- Leadership development towards obtaining the best outcomes from SBM was situational and personal, and generally rested upon extensive management experience.

- Principal leadership growth was assisted and facilitated by thoughtful engagement with the system and its processes, with its demands and its people, and particularly with principal colleagues.

- Educational theory and research was valued as a "background" influence, potentially important, but was not seen as a major driver of change or principal development in the day-to-day operation of the schools. In terms of reading and

research, it is clear that this path was highly individual for each participant. One participant commented that theory and research ideas could be "imported" because of a working association with a university.

- The SPC was very important in supporting, helping to design, and sometimes initiating and validating innovative action at the school level.

It was clear from their statements that the participants approached their jobs from the basis of strongly held values and beliefs, and that they were universally confident in their sense of purpose. As can be seen from the variety and import of innovations discussed by the participating principals in their responses to Question 2 above, participants had been able to achieve significant and context appropriate innovations at their school. None of the principals indicated that these gains were easily won and all pointed to mitigating circumstances, many of which were generated by draconian system requirements and stood in the way of their reforms.

All participants valued their colleague principals in terms of their ongoing development and for sharing ideas, but they also valued people from a wide range of other situations, from university professors to some of their own school's students. There was reference to the intense focus and long hours required for what was in their view an increasingly complex role. They reported that the intensity of their roles pushed them to seriously reflect on who they were as individuals and how much they could achieve as principals without suffering unwarranted personal or professional cost.

Theme 7: Multiple layers of bureaucracy

When this research was carried out there was still essentially a tri-level system operating in NSW: a state office representing the system, districts (currently called Public Schools Director areas), and schools. According to Fullan (2016), the issue of

school, district (including quasi-district groups organised by local principals and the

SPC), and the system—when considered as a whole—required a coherent approach

across all three levels if success was to be achieved. Participants noted that:

- Coherence was a struggle; to one extent or another, the participating principals

  held a view that genuinely supportive, coherent practice in the NSW system was

  either ineffective, only partly successful, or non-existent. In their views

  coherence was clearly not a feature of the current NSW system.

- The degree of coherence, including that around site-based innovation, and the

  extent to which this was effective, were both reported as highly variable and

  dependent upon geographic location and specific personnel and resource

  constraints. Specifically, Public Schools Directors in the current structure were

  far more often than not seen to do little to support or assist principals in their

  efforts to be innovative.

- Some system units, personnel, and support processes were seen as very useful

  by the participating principals but others were seen to work against SBM, as

  forces limiting local principal authority or simply as irrelevant in supporting the

  real-world operation of schools.

In the data, no evidence was found indicating exemplary levels of collaboration

or coherence within the DEC. In contrast, principals felt that the support they were

offered was discordant with their needs and that the system's goals were often

incongruous with their own. Educational purposes were not always aligned. As a result,

they felt that they spent too much time and energy "managing up" to appease senior

officers and to attempt to ensure "common ground" with the system's supervisory or

support personnel. Two participants were of the view that there was little if any

understanding by the system about how to lead and manage change, and that too many

people in the DoE ended up "having nothing to do with any kind of innovation, reform,

idea, or implementation process" (PW). One participant simply described the current

situation as "messy." The only response that principals considered helpful was the

suggestion that they form their own quasi-district networks of supportive, local

principal colleagues, a practice that was also advocated by the SPC.

Incisive Perceptions from Participants

This first phase of data gathering revealed significant insights from the

participant principals. Notwithstanding the significant commonalities, the interview

responses pointed to the uniqueness of the context of each school but also to the

uniqueness of the school leader's style, purposes, and perceptions.

One important finding was the suggestion from PZ that if, as a principal, you:

understand the enablers, the drivers, and the impediments around you; combine that

knowledge with enough experience; and, involve yourself in "managing up," then it is

possible to "transcend" SBM. In other words, PZ, who was implementing an ambitious,

local innovation to suit her context, felt that such a policy made little difference. While

most of the other participating principals touched upon this notion, PZ was especially

articulate about it. All eight principals did however indicate that it was essential to know

how to lift innovative practices above the many "road blocks" and bureaucratic "make

work," and how to manipulate the many often interrelated factors that potentially

underpin local success.

If some of the system's procedures, policies, and reforms were a generation

behind some schools' existing practices, this was important because it could leave

principals in a difficult position, had they moved their staff a long way ahead of what

the system currently viewed as good practice. Innovation and change generally meant increased workloads for everyone, participants said, and this required that their staff believe both in the need for change and that the timing of its implementation was appropriate.

All eight principals clearly had personal drive, significant experience, moral conviction, and self-belief. According to participants, while their supervisors might be equally dedicated, they were generally constrained by their roles in a highly centralised, risk-averse bureaucracy. PX, PT, and PS addressed these matters more directly than other participants and explained that being "locally correct" when designing reforms did not mean necessarily your supervisor agreed that a particular innovation was acceptable. This uncertainty could leave a principal in a difficult position if they wanted to generate change or even maintain an existing innovation program. The personal cost for a principal could be high, noted both PT and PY, if a principal raised expectations for a school community and was then unable to deliver. PT observed that a major inhibitor to innovative practice occurred when a principal, acting in good faith, set out a reform agenda believing it could be achieved within system policy, and later discovered that decisions had been made above principal level that required an energy sapping and humiliating public back down. Another insight came via a question from PZ: Why is it that the system only occasionally provides policy based upon best practice?

According to PT, as leaders, principals needed to be "on the boundary and always needed to be the one who's pushing those boundaries." He also put forward the view that achieving innovation was as much about "will and skill" as it was about understanding what should be done. All participants indicated that the challenge for principals lay in having the will to constantly navigate through difficult terrain.

Some participants saw SBM as an enabler because at least some changes could happen locally, particularly if you were one of the schools implementing the LSLD policy, and this could offer confidence to a principal about their leadership effectiveness. PV said SBM had the potential to enable team building; more importantly, it could lead to a whole-school ethos of lifelong learning and the inevitable positive consequences of this in both thought and action for students and staff. Equally, depending on local circumstances, it could be of limited usefulness.

According to PV, system constraints, excessive compliance, and inappropriate or poorly targeted accountability processes do more than make innovation difficult. Such impediments could lead to inequity between schools because "one-size-fits-all" generated both winners and losers once context was considered. More broadly, PW claimed that the real driver of site-based innovation was actually societal change. In this respect, positive drivers tended to centre on the profession, both the principalship and staff, but also the whole education community, rather than around endless system reforms. In a period of great economic disruption and changing work practices, traditional solutions do not work; "it will not be good enough just to improve," she said. They [the system] don't recognise the disruptive power of what's actually happening underneath in society."

PZ commented that you are obligated to align your school operations and processes with the current system, government policies, and accountability requirements. However, if rigidly applied, that was operationally impossible to achieve given the demands of time and energy in leading a school. For example, PX indicated that long, almost daily, staff meetings might be required in order to ensure complete policy implementation.

This notion of the system and its senior officers directing ever more tasks, of trying to implement ever more reforms and policies (that may later be deemed wrong, unacceptable or simply changed) with an already overworked staff, was of serious concern to most participants:

We want to be creative and we want to be imaginative because that's where the passion is; it's the rubbish, the poor products, the poor processes, the poor implementation [that negatively affect progress]. The number of reforms that [we are expected to undertake] cannot possibly be done well. (PY)

This statement was not apparently a criticism of staff who have to survive and develop in such an environment. Instead, it was strong criticism of a system beset by shallow thinking and political influence. Either in spite of or because of this environment, one principal claimed that "this next generation of teachers that are coming through probably want to know more, more quickly than any other group I've worked with" (PZ). On the other hand, she claimed that a positive attitude was hard to maintain for older or senior members of the profession, given their years of exposure to system and supervisory problems and ambiguities:

The wellbeing of a lot of people has really suffered [due particularly to the excessive quantity and pace of reforms] and I do know from different roles that I've held that there have been a lot of really experienced principals who pulled up stumps; that's not been good. (PZ)

Subsequent Research Stage

The approach used in this research was designed to provide increasingly nuanced, comprehensive insights into the participants' perceptions about the drivers and

impediments to innovation at their schools as the work progressed. The three results chapters have been designed to incrementally build more meaning and detail into the answers to the level 2 research questions.

The many significant ideas, concepts, and themes that have been raised in Phase 1 require deeper exploration. This resulted in two types of more focussed questions being developed for use in Phase 2: four common questions to be put to all eight participants, and two specific questions developed on a case-by-case basis to follow up on information provided by individual principals (second protocol questions 5 and 6). Developing the Phase 2 protocol in this reflective way served a secondary purpose by assisting with member checking for Phase 1. Chapter 5 reports on the results of the second interviews protocol.

Conclusion

The information reported from the Phase 1 interviews connected to particular insights from the individual participants. In addition, these insights assisted me in articulating a first pass on the seven common themes built on concepts raised by the participants during the interview. These initial themes provided information to assist in framing the Phase 2 and Phase 3 interviews protocols. It was clear, even at this early stage, the methodology being used did not in any way "treat practice as a mechanistic reaction" (Eacott, 2011, p. 102). As Eacott (2011) noted, to understand school leadership we need to accept its complexity and view it holistically. A complexity science based view sees leadership as an influence process that arises through interactions across the organization: leadership happens in "the space between" people as they interact (Goldstein et al., 2010). A school is a highly complex entity in itself (Holmes et al., 2013) but according to this study's participants, once a school and its

principal begin to interact with other parts of the DoE system, a new level of complexity emerges.

While seven themes were presented in this chapter, as the data set increased in both volume and sophistication during Phase 2 and Phase 3, these themes were necessarily refined and condensed to ensure a more focussed analysis could ultimately be undertaken. Through this mechanism increased meaning could be taken from the complex matters that had been arising. For example, the themes that had emerged at this point provided evidence that these experienced principals did not consider there to be a linear relationship between increasing SBM and their capacity to innovate. It appeared that a very important component of a principal's ability to lead his or her school innovatively, and to gain maximum traction from SBM, was having the capacity to cope and to respond effectively to a highly varied array of impediments while maximising the use of any positive drivers. The participant perceptions do not point to simple answers. One possible way forward might lie in taking action to support policy development and implementation such that system policy more deeply respects contextual difference. Another approach to reform could be to further consider the way that principals approach educational theory and research. The data to this point indicates that any actions taken might need to more deeply consider principal capacity and authority and how these matters might enable context appropriate responses to achieving improved site-based innovative leadership.

Chapter 5

Phase 2 Interview Results

This issue of building a culture suiting innovation: it's not an easy thing to do because you're not a rock, with no effect on you from the sea. You're being washed all over the shop. I think that's going to become the biggest challenge that principals are going to face over time. (PZ)

Introduction

In this chapter I will report in detail on the information gathered during August 2016, using the second interview protocol and additional specific questions that individual participants were asked, based on their responses.

I structured the Phase 2 responses around the emerging sub-themes to refine and expand upon the seven themes developed in the Phase 1 analysis. The analysis was again organised on the basis of the actual questions that were asked beginning with the common questions before moving on to consider the principal-specific questions. Four

major themes are identified that collectively summarise the participants' perceptions up to this point in the research process.

Approach to Analysis

I coded the data following the same approach used in Phase 1, colour-coding the transcripts according to the seven Phase 1 themes. Any "outliers" to the original seven themes were incorporated into the response summaries, following a constant comparative approach to arrive at deeper understandings (Fram, 2013).

For example, copious comments were offered during the Phase 2 interviews to indicate that, because of the ineffective way decision-making authority was distributed across the DEC, lack of coherence was likely to become a significant issue for principals seeking to be innovative in their schools. Working iteratively through the Phase 2 transcripts led to the identification of a refined Phase 2 theme around coherence, tri-level reform, and contradictory subsidiarity related to the DEC's multi-layered bureaucracy, progressively strengthening understanding in this aspect of the participating principals' work.

Question 1: Given your experiences with SBM, to what extent has the initiative been a success or failure?

Balancing SBM and system control. Two closely related participant perspectives emerged early in the analysis: the first concerning school-based autonomy and the second concerning compliance with system imperatives. The most significant theme to emerge related to the pervasive sense of tension, as reported by principals,

between local independence and external control. Principals felt as if they were trapped
between these competing forces:

> In broad-brush terms, I'd say we're caught between a rock and a hard place at
> the moment because if there was genuine school-based management allowed,
> then I think that there's an opportunity for that to be very effective. I don't think
> there is. I think the system is still constraining us. SBM has a level of
> accountability that makes it not school-based management. The accountability
> framework increases your workload and there's a lack of trust. (PV)

Concern about lack of trust of principals was another recurring theme in the
data.

PW was even more direct concerning the NSW LSLD policy's shortcomings:

> School-based management in the NSW iteration is pretty close to failure.
> Although I think the initiative has been a failure, I think there are schools that
> have done the best they can with it. It is not time-saving, it is not staff saving, it
> doesn't do any of those things, and my great fear is that the longer process [of
> SBM implementation and what is happening around it], will divert teachers and
> executive staff away from the core business of teaching and learning. The focus
> has very much in our system been on compliance, compliance management.
> (PW)

PV identified a related concern indicating that it was the number of new
constraints which had arrived with the SBM initiatives that represented the most
concern for him. Under the umbrella of LSLD, he said that principals were supposed to
obtain increased local control and authority but that, in reality, the opposite was
happening. He felt that the system talked about LSLD as an increase in SBM, yet they

were in fact trying to dictate everything, right down to very specific management systems (like the "failed" LMBR) because "they want a 'one-size-fits-all' management" solution.

PY saw LSLD as an SBM initiative that was constrained and effectively disabled by the prevailing system ethos of centralised control:

> "We've got Local Schools Local Decisions and we want you to have some flexibility," says the system. Yes, but what the system can't manage is all of those obstacles that prevent you from really being flexible. If only the system would just get a little looser so that we could really get it right. Consider assets matters, as an example. I've got the money, let me spend the money, but Assets [DEC's centralised unit supporting assets management in schools] would say, "No, the rules are, da, da, da, da." (PY)

This view was shared by PZ. Elaborating further to the discussion about how a principal could be forced to engage with an imperfect SBM approach he noted that there were elements of SBM that were contributing to the success of schools, and there were elements that were probably holding schools back. Although he did not express any negative views about educational reform, and did in fact feel that the concept of SBM —in its purest form—was a good idea, he did note that "the 'loosening' [of centralised control of local decision making] became very 'tight' again, and very, very quickly."

For some principals the DEC's adherence to its legacy systems, poor record of success with new systems, and excessively bureaucratic mindset had become barriers to devolution in themselves. PZ summarised this as the system having excessive "red tape", considering the bureaucracy and its many uncoordinated layers and systems as greater impediments than ever before. Furthermore, she believed that the red tape was targeted towards particular areas that enhanced system control. This was reinforced by

PS, who stated, "We had enough [compliance] before, and we had to do it, and we did it, but now we've got even more! We've got that [management] level that doesn't have any consideration for what's happening at the local level." PS wanted system rhetoric to line up with how change was practised in schools; indeed, PT said that there was "a gulf underneath the rhetoric."

PX discussed the current bureaucratic workloads as something common to the great majority of principals. He commented that 90% of principals at a recent SPC meeting, said that they were "up to their ears with compliance reporting to the point that they're now having to hire business managers."

PU said that, as an LSLD school, SBM had generally been a success because it gave her "a bit more flexibility, particularly in the funding component." For PU, this was important because the funding component had helped her to employ various staff to meet the specific needs of her school. She was however, equivocal about the value of SBM to her innovative practice:

> There seems to be a whole lot of centralised procedures coming in. At the same time, school-based management, I think, is still able to operate. In my opinion, there's not been anything that we've thought we want to do that we can't. There is certainly a revival of the Department, the various Directorates, I guess, driving what schools do. As I said, I don't have a problem with the principal of every school in whatever context, having the opportunity to use their funding to change their staffing, to do what they need to do. I think the Department has put in some really good, flexible processes to do that. (PU)

It seemed that SBM was of value to PU because it enabled her to innovate within her local context, in an important yet narrowly defined field. The other seven participants expressed deeper concerns about the imperfect and operationally

constrained nature of the system's current SBM initiatives. Highlighting the relationship between SBM and innovation, PT said:

> Has SBM made any difference to the progress of my innovations here? Probably not, no. However, it's an encouragement from the system and we're very happy to have that take place. The system will say we need to be prepared because we're going to be given a lot more independence, a lot more power. That power and their devolution of power using Local Schools Local Decisions has been mixed in implementation but it has created a culture. It has been empowering for some people who have been prepared and confident to take off and run with it. The issue of centralisation paralleling SBM is a paradox. (PT)

Local workloads and accountabilities under SBM. PS recognised a counteracting pressure or "push down" from the system above that had increased workloads in schools. He said that whilst he had always wanted freedom and flexibility at the local level, and had always worked towards that outcome in any way possible, he commented that he would be happy to have an increased workload if he also had more flexibility. However, the increasing pressure from above had instead resulted in "hours, and hours, and hours [of] colouring in boxes for the Department that in effect becomes meaningless." PS went on to say that principals were once able to decide paths and take needed actions but "now they want to know the minutia of how you're going to get there. People are bogged down all over the place in getting there and often lose sight of the end goal."

This concern was similar to those echoed by other participants—if you overwhelm principals with excessive system mandates, then local flexibility must suffer. It was about the finite limitations on principals' time and energy.

PZ took a tangential view and posited that in reality "the local level's got to look after itself." She said this was because the contexts of individual schools were not being given the consideration they needed and deserved. In her view the administrative demands were greater and the system quicker to intervene, especially if the system perceived the results to be poor in a particular school. She commented that "the tsunami that is coming towards us is going to wreak havoc on schools, yet we've [supposedly] got school-based management?" She went on to express a view that the system was not thinking through what had been successful within local management of schools; instead, they had taken a top-down approach and not considered what had been happening "on the bottom" at all:

> Some brilliant minds have been looking at the reforms and the processes. I don't know that they've really looked at what the human factor is in this. That's a variable you can't control. You have to wait until you see it actually on the ground. It's interesting that the intervention model is there so quickly and so strongly because there's not the support outside the school to be able to do it. Seventy percent of your money is in school so there's not the consultancy support. (PZ)

Similarly, PV said that there were very real barriers to principals making important local decisions because now they had to manage many tasks for the system whilst bearing the brunt of inappropriate policy. He noted that staffing flexibility had generally improved but reflected back to an example where an inappropriate system-enforced appointment had directly damaged teaching and learning at his school. At the time, a teacher was needed for a specific curriculum area and he would have preferred to locally appoint a particular candidate. However, as he put it, "I was kyboshed by system staffing rules because there was a teacher who had 'rights' to a position under the

priority transfer system; that person was imposed on me." This was challenging because the system-enforced candidate did not have the required skill set or personal characteristics to fit the demands of the position nor the prevailing ethos of the school.

PX reflected on this issue of local flexibility in a more abstract way, stating that "there's not a lot of institutional knowledge out there around managing change, so then it keeps falling back onto the principal and how they're going to try and manage it themselves" (PX).

Drivers of change. Drivers of change appeared in the data to stem from forces both internal and external to a school. PV provided a view about competition for enrolments which he saw as one of the drivers for local actions by many principals. He commented that he knew of many people who consider it that education is not a business, but in his view, it really is a business. He believed that this was necessary in order for schools to be successful. He stated:

> The driver at this school is competitiveness. It's the principal that has responsibility for improving the performance of the school at every level, from the micro-level through to the broad-brush level through to the big picture of success or otherwise. If you want me to do that then you've got to allow actions to suit the nuances of the local environment. The local community has to be catered for. Until you do that you're never going to give principals the capacity to actually do their job to the best of their ability. (PV)

While PV saw school performance as survival of the fittest (that ultimately rests on the capacity of the principal), PW saw it as an issue of structural inequality that was generally beyond a school's capacity to control. Specifically, PW identified a different driver for improvement at a school level. She said that parent choice was a "powerful economic decision" that directly influenced a school's chances of success on many

fronts, and that this also impacted its ability to consider all avenues for change. She further noted that this factor generally caused difficulty for the schools that most needed assistance. The potential impact was that schools with difficult enrolment circumstances had to make "some really, really hard decisions." A large enrolment meant more funds to spend on much needed programs. Schools in lower socio-educational circumstance had to fight harder for enrolments and were often smaller, constraining the opportunity for SBM because there was less discretionary funding for innovation. Schools with overflowing enrolments serving high socio-economic communities had a greater capacity to exercise flexibility. PW's view was that SBM was not an even playing field because, if all schools were given equal licence to manage locally under the LSLD policy, schools with low enrolments would still have more problems than others. She added that the two highest HSC performing comprehensive state public high schools were quite innovative but did not have to be because their favourable contexts meant they would receive strong enrolments whether or not they were innovative.

Paradoxically, PW identified structural inequality as a driver for change in her school. Given her school's challenging situation, it did not have the luxury of being conservative, or of just working well within the status quo: "Schools like ours can't take that lower innovation pathway because we're just average at delivering that current model. We actually have to be much better at delivering the current model than others in the end." Her deeper message was that LSLD could not address the structural inequalities that impact on the leadership of schools.

Bureaucratic intervention. PX gave examples of how bureaucratic intervention can directly influence school-level innovation:

This school was involved in the DEC's "Schools of the Future" program. We were "kicked off" that program because we had primary schools involved. Now,

that [program] was a Department-designed innovation model. They said we weren't kicked off, they said we were outside the scope [primary schooling not in policy]. "Maybe you need to do something else," they said. So since then, the whole idea about the Department wanting innovation, well, it's not real. You're only going to have improvement at your school if you weather the change, adapt, overcome, and then get going. Centralist political power may not be very effective once it gets down to the principal level. (PX)

More generally:

Within the Department, yep, all the policies, I know they're there to support schools, but I think they need to go to the next level in terms of, "Okay, here's your policies," which every school should be running on. But instead of having compliance above us, we should have a system saying, "Right, well, what do you want to try?" We should trust schools to implement whatever a kid needs, and go from there. (PX)

PX continued, pointing to the cause of many principal frustrations, commenting that in his opinion, there had been a lack of depth in area/regional level work around strategic or critical thinking, including "outside-the-box stuff":

There's lots of, "Well, here's your management plan, let's go through and tick the boxes," which is one part of what is required, but [then] there's, "No, well, let's throw the management plan out, what do the kids need?" I'm finding that it's increasing my workload quite a lot in terms of trying to basically start this cart from scratch. (PX)

PU said she had tried to follow the lead of the Department, tried to follow all the requirements and make sure things were done so that her school was compliant but that

this was not always easy. Using the LMBR management system as an example, she said that she thought the best way forward to overcome LMBR implementation might be termed "partial compliance." As she put it, "I try not to let [all the system requirements] impede where we want to go, but I think excessive compliance and reporting impacts on innovation in schools." She also noted that her office had been using LMBR, as was required of all LSLD schools, "but not exclusively. I've got good people doing things required for our local needs. We're not implementing all of the LMBR system because it just doesn't work; much of that system isn't working for us at the moment."

On the matter of LMBR, PW saw it as another example of how the system cannot properly engage with the reality of change. She believed it demonstrated that the system's policies and edicts were poorly designed. She said software like LMBR was not designed to improve the quality of the way things worked at school level. Instead, it was really about *system* needs and an example of the "litany of poor design." This suggests that systems such as LMBR suffer because of the poor dialogue between senior management and schools.

PY, who said that "there is no understanding of feedback from the coalface," also added that the end result at the school level of imposed processes such as LMBR was to limit local success. A majority of the participants referred to LMBR as a failure of system support; they stated that over a period of years, their feedback about its inadequacies was essentially disregarded and they considered it as a failure of senior leadership to understand the problems of school level administration. PY went as far as saying that, in her opinion, LMBR was an "absolute dud, a criminal waste of the money that has gone into that system; the inferior product that it is, it is shameful." PS indicated that her director had heard her concerns but claimed it would take ministerial

intervention to actually get things moving with LMBR, essentially passing the responsibility up the chain.

Summarising, participants indicted quite strongly that while they could see great value being part of a public education system, the types of bureaucratic interventions that they were experiencing in their schools was working against change. This was partly because of system incompetence in the way it was trying to support its schools, partly because of inappropriate policy settings and partly because too few people working external to schools understood how change worked.

Trust and influence. PW said that she believed that change was really about an interactive set of actions involving management, leadership, and influence. She provided a pragmatic view of school change:

> Change happens with people. It's how you influence people to want to change that really matters, which is why influence is so much more powerful in schools than control. Good leadership and management; whatever you're doing, you can't do it unless the working conditions, the decision-making, the communication, all the processes, all the management structures, you can't do leadership [well], unless you've got all this sorted. … If you don't get all the management right, the school won't be able to deal with the higher order change stuff. You've got to be able to provide the kind of systems around teachers that will allow them to work well. (PW)

PW's position was that the ability to influence others rested on certain personal characteristics that a principal should have that if used well, could build their effectiveness and authority. She believed that there was less principal professional authority than in the past because of factors such as increasing central control and excessive, poorly designed accountability processes that now work against a principal's

capacity to respond to the possibilities of SBM. She was clear that this tension was the key issue in actually making school-based management unworkable and offered an explanation for the lack of suitable principal authority for an SBM environment: "they did not change the culture of the group at the top, the corporate could not bear to give up control."

PX also took the view that trust of his work was directly linked to his effectiveness:

> I need to be trusted by my Public Schools Director that I'm looking after the school. I need to be trusted by the parents because I'm looking after the most precious thing they have, trusted by the kids that when they leave here they're prepared, and trusted by staff that the working conditions are such that they can do their job. (PX)

"It is about saving money, and politics" Using as an example the funding that is provided for professional development and differentiated programs, PT highlighted the issue of trust as exemplified by the system's financial structures and how these structures constrained local spending priorities. His concern revolved around the format of the provision, the rules around its application; these were generic, he said, noting that:

> If you're going to have a generic format for these things then it's a little bit at odds if you are trying to make something which is more bespoke, or trying to customise things within your local school to the needs that you perceive. (PT)

PT further observed that there was a tension between the DoE approach to funding schools, which he claimed had to be generic because the system had to be able to show

equity, and the contextual need to make funding fit particular school programs. PV added to this view, explicitly stating, "[T]here's a lack of trust in what I do."

PV saw the issue of funding as a fundamental driving force in relation to opportunities to be innovative at the school level. He saw the overwhelming driving force of a large bureaucracy like the DoE as being about saving money: to be as efficient as possible around money. He posited that this defeats the purpose of entrepreneurship at the school level, and attenuates the concept of principals as managers of their own businesses. Yet at the same time, principals were asked to make their "local businesses" as efficient and as successful as possible. He felt that equity considerations trump genuine approaches to flexibility and successful local innovation.

Inertia and risk aversion. PW said that the external constraints placed upon principals are endless. She added that this situation is compounded by a deeply ingrained inertia: "there's inertia, of the systems and of people; governments have inertia, all government departments have inertia, so there's a resistance to change." She believed that if society wants real educational change and improvement, it needed to challenge the self-interested internal politics of groups of senior people and the people who just want to have control; such aspects needed to be removed. She saw this culture as being deeply embedded in the current DoE senior officers, and viewed this as a major problem: "they just kept promoting the current people," she said.

One concept of broad agreement among participants that emerged during the Phase 2 interviews was how the DoE culture unwittingly could actively work against innovation. PW gave an example noting that the Department had just opened an Innovations Unit but they brought in a particular group of people to run it who may not have had a great deal of practical school innovation experience and, as a principal, you had to go and "do a fixed process to 'learn' how to be innovative." She did not see such

an approach as ever being effective, and said it reflected her view of the controlling, bureaucratic, and backward-looking culture of the system. In essence, she said, the design of SBM in NSW had been poorly conceptualised.

SBM: success or failure? During the Phase 2 interviews, all participants were asked whether they could rate their perception of SBM's level of success or failure as a percentage figure. This summary device was mainly used to prompt discussion. Few participants gave a direct answer. PX suggested 70/30 towards SBM being successful but qualified this by saying that he had attended a conference with one of the state's most applauded and experienced principals and that "[afterwards] we sat in the car saying… there's something wrong, not with us but with the whole system." SBM appeared in his view to be deeply entangled with system culture and structural issues.

As previously reported, PU believed that SBM was quite successful in some areas but constrained in others. Overall, she was more positive about SBM than the other participants, or at least communicated fewer caveats. PT also noted that it was "on the whole, a success, because it has given me the opportunity to shape what I want to shape, which is curriculum." He observed that SBM had shaken up some of the thinking about how principals go about things and that it had the potential to facilitate reflection. Yet, he also added, "it certainly hasn't initiated change."

PV said, in many ways, the notion of increasing SBM was a myth but gave no percentage. PW and PS expressed views that SBM was 90% unsuccessful. PZ and PY implied a 40/60 ratio against SBM. PV added, "I don't think SBM success or failure has ever been measured. I don't know what it looks like. What does school-based management success look like in broad-brush terms?" Thinking like this succinctly captures a more widely held opinion among the participants that the value of SBM

should not be "blindly" accepted but questioned by principals and the system in terms of its impacts.

PT was concerned that there may be a "hidden agenda" in SBM implementation. While some increased decision making power had been devolved to principals, this surreptitiously provided an excuse for strengthening both system and government oversight and control. He commented that in the current environment there was a lot of "top-down responsiveness" to politicians. Departmental senior officers were increasingly engaging in interference at the school level, or forcing accountabilities on principals because of fear about what politicians might say about problems in schools. One additional factor he mentioned was that the media had essentially become a political force. As such, change was being driven not by the genuine needs of individual schools, but by political and media discourses around education in general.

Examples of ill-considered policies and regulation. The principals identified a number of instances of what they saw as ill-considered policies and excessive regulation. PV gave an assets-based example of how policy may lead to frustrating inefficiencies. He said he wanted to undertake minor capital works for which the school had already completed a detailed proposal and formally obtained three quotes. The DoE advised that he needed permission, and ultimately agreed to the works, but also insisted that they manage the project "at an extra cost." The project was then stalled for months while the DoE Assets Unit developed its own business proposal. PV was deeply frustrated that he had followed a policy that he considered as inefficient and bureaucratic, and yet still could not achieve a simple asset goal in a reasonable time frame.

Interestingly, PW commented that partially implementing SBM could result in issues of safety. She related an incident of bullying at a government high school that led

to an unfortunate outcome, in spite of the abundance of DoE policy relating to bullying. The end result was that the school involved had insufficient control over a key decision, yet were held accountable by the DoE and the principal admonished by the responsible senior officers for not "ticking off" every policy requirement:

> The system is about compliance but more critically it's about deep control. SBM is not really happening, in fact in the management area, in areas of school finance, school assets, school operations, we have actually moved the other way. (PW)

In summary, PW observed that the system was very risk-averse but that this did not stop critical incidents happening in schools. In fact, SBM had the potential to attenuate school leadership and render it less (rather than more) effective.

Participants provided examples of excessive reform or policy impost that effectively disrespected the efforts of schools to improve the lot of their students and be innovative. PZ offered a specific example of policy driven by politics and how this could diminish school innovation:

> The NSW Premier has announced that he wants quite a significant increase by 2020 in certain student outcomes. But that is a very short period of time in educational change and it's to be done with no additional resources; you tag it on to everything else you're doing. Forget your school plan. You tag it on and you do it. It's giving principals the message that existing planning policy says this, the [educational] philosophy says, "[T]his is your framework," but then political power comes to the fore and politicians come in over the top of what's already been decided, what is already happening. (PZ)

PZ expressed serious concern about the impact of government and bureaucratic interventions, including the time and energy costs of compliance on school-level planning, noting that a school was already a complex place that had its own directions:

> The pressure on schools to be able to show everything that they're doing locally and to account for innovations that they may have put in place and explain the impact that they've got on kids: it's mind-blowing. Things are being put in place for it all to become inspectorial. The groundwork is being laid in terms of accountability, and maybe excessive accountability. We've got new principals coming in and there's one in particular who I think has had four or five external audits in 12 months, three of those in one term, and more coming up. How does that encourage somebody to go into a leadership role? How does that support that person's learning to be able to be an effective principal? What we are creating is a machine that is high on compliance. Yes, there are things that we have to do as school leaders. Yes, there are key responsibilities. But those responsibilities have never been articulated to the level that they are now. (PZ)

She was also concerned that principal workloads, professional pressures, and levels of frustration had been exacerbated because of the inefficient coordination of the DEC's support structures:

> Within the Department, we've always worked with silos [DoE policy and support units]. I'm actually feeling that the silos are getting worse, not better. Some of the silos have disappeared to be replaced by others. Those silos don't necessarily appear to be talking to each other anymore than what the others were. (PZ)

Also relating to the problems of support for school operations PS discussed how "inappropriate people" designing operational systems and accountability processes could cause genuine difficulties for schools, consuming principals' energy and time and adding unnecessary professional constraints. The particular example he raised was the design of accountability processes, designs he felt often seemed to be made in abstract from schools trying to maximise aspects of their operation. PS's concern was that the misunderstandings and ineptitude of supervisors, of the system and the government, had the potential to erode not only principals' confidence but also their capacity to innovate. He provided the following example of the impact of inappropriate accountability processes:

> The BOSTES registration check of schools generated a number of concerns about particular schools and these were handed on to the DEC. It was decided that the work on this matter should be undertaken by the DoE High Performance Unit such that actions for appropriate schools could be considered. The person in question who was responsible for that filtering was from a small country primary school, and although a principal, the person may not have understood things as complex as the HSC. For example, this school was sent out a very detailed description of what we would need to provide, things such as HSC grading advice. Of course, there is no such thing as HSC grading advice. (PS)

Question 2. How highly do you rate matters relating to subsidiarity (level of community control, local action permissions) as a concept in modern education? Is there a relationship to increasing SBM? In terms of the innovation/s we talked about last time, has SBM made any difference to its progress?

Innovation progress. PU stated that SBM has made a difference because she could employ the right people at the right time. However, PS, PT, PV, and PY all considered that their own innovation projects would have progressed regardless of SBM. PW suggested that because of the system's responses to its own devolution initiative, there have been increased impediments. PX was somewhat ambivalent about this issue, although firmly backing the position that progress with innovation was about what he and his staff could actually do. PZ suggested that there were elements of SBM that might help innovations progress but did not comment on her own.

Where should responsibility for improvement lie? PW took a broad view that the school level was not necessarily able to economically and politically control some of the key factors of schooling; and the system, which controls all schools, was not in itself controlling the right things partly because they were preoccupied with compliance and accountability. She suggested that a public system approach to education was the right one, but that in reality public education was under threat. She said there had been many

efforts, particularly at a federal level and among right-wing politicians, to destroy system approaches such as the NSW public education system. These politicians wanted to break down the outstanding relationships that people had built between schools, their communities, and within the system of schools.

Subsidiarity. PV made it clear that in his view, the NSW Government/Department had not identified the best approaches to subsidiarity in education. He said:

> Not even close. We don't have financial autonomy, we don't have managerial autonomy, we don't have staffing autonomy, we're not even going to know how much money is in our bank accounts and we can't even write our own cheques. And such things should be local. There are central efficiencies that can help: layers of complexity around superannuation, leave and all that sort of stuff which I'm very happy for the system to manage for me and I'm very happy for them to manage broad-brush media issues, legal issues, and protect us under that broad umbrella. But, the nuts and bolts that allow you run the school properly, locally, those nuts and bolts aren't sorted. (PV)

PT expressed a similarly negative attitude, pointing to the importance of the "nuts and bolts" of school leadership and management. It seems that PT and PV saw a disconnection between the real-world flexibility that they needed in order to operate their schools and the reality of the authority that the system granted them.

Whilst PY expressed the view that the balance between school and system responsibilities could be further improved, she still wanted to be part of the public school system:

With that comes some rules and regulations, of course, some accountability, lots of accountability; absolutely, we should tick all of those boxes. Of course, we want that, but we need some flexibility and the flexibility has to come more in staffing, more in the management of our assets, more in the management of our systems. (PY)

In accordance with this view, PZ described a major problem with the current level of subsidiarity. She identified the supposed flattening of management structures as an issue, emphasising that funding always matters to local innovation. She said that funding problems significantly added to local workloads but with few local gains. If 70% of the funding was in schools, then it was reasonable for the system to have measures in place to ensure that it was being used appropriately and that schools were achieving results: "I totally get that but, in amongst that flattening of the structure, you're also talking a lot of that administration stuff that was done for schools, done beyond schools … you're taking it and you're putting it back into schools" (PZ). Elaborating further, she indicated that 70% of monies in schools meant that there was little clerical work done outside of schools but that it had to be done somewhere. This impost could directly affect teaching and learning because schools needed to have less, not more, clerical positions so that principals could allocate resources to teachers and teaching support.

PT articulated a view that related subsidiarity to his local circumstances. He made a case as to why principals need substantial school-level control over finances, planning, and accountability to enable local achievements, particularly since local stakeholder groups could be so influential:

Now, that comes down to me and that's a really good example I think of how subsidiarity, in terms of what should be managed at the school, can work

because I have a highly involved, highly intelligent school community that
wants to be able to participate, wants to be able to contribute. I need to be able to
align those various stakeholder groups and have that coalesce…. that is
something that a bigger system cannot possibly understand because that type of
approach creates too many frustrations for it and also it doesn't really
understand the unique culture that you have within each school. (PT)

PV believed that in any discussion of site-based innovation, the notion of the
locus of economic and political decision-making was "really key." He suggested that
this locus should be thought of as the point at which control decisions were made
around the lives of the children being educated, and around the lives of everyone in the
school learning community. He offered the following example:

For us [in schools] to be as effective as we possibly can be, we need staff
control. Successful managers operate under the premise that they can select their
own staff; they can't operate within a context where their staff are not operating
within their philosophy, their framework. If staff don't do that then in private
industry those staff generally move on because they're not delivering at the level
of expectation of management? That is not the case [for public schools], yet we
have SBM? (PV)

PX cited policy duplication as an indicator of current ineffective subsidiarity
design. There was a waste of energy, he said, because the Department and the NSW
Government want policy systems at every level to ensure high visibility. Their approach
was not as concerned with effective implementation of policy as much as it was with
community and political perception:

The Department has a policy for everything, and yet schools are expected to have a policy for the same things but for their own context. If we were serious about commonality, systematising what we're doing, one policy should be used across all sites. We shouldn't have to rewrite them just for local context. We should fit the policy into our local context. We shouldn't have to make adjustments for it. Sometimes you can't have a policy for everything but governments don't like it if they don't look good. (PX)

PX felt it was unfortunate that the requirement for policy duplication was actively policed. In the case of NSW, this "policing" was undertaken by (BOSTES), whose external auditors are tasked with reviewing school policies. However, if a principal simply supplied the auditors with the DoE policy document, it was rejected because in the auditor's view, it may not have been actioned locally.

School culture. PW related subsidiarity to belief structures among leaders. She posited that an important goal was to get everybody to think and believe the same thing, and said, "[T]hat's the power of leadership, in my opinion ... to actually work on values and beliefs so we get shared and agreed values which then influence what we do." At the school level, the key value was to understand everything about the learners you were responsible for, focussing on student strengths and on their capacities. Such a focus positively influenced your culture and reduced the number of times you had to suspend or expel students. This was important for innovation, she explained, because a positive focus influenced a school leaders' available time and thus capacity to do other things.

PT provided support for the importance of whole-school cooperative learning cultures by stating that you had to have a school culture "to bring everyone together." Contributing to this idea, albeit from a slightly different perspective, PX suggested that if the staff did not buy into the ideas that a leader had outlined, then the leader was not

leading, they were "bossing," and there would be no change. By extension, PX's general approach to this question suggests that he too was responding in the same way that his staff may have done; that is, reluctant to buy in to some of the DEC's policies.

PV commented that it is the principal's responsibility to establish an overarching innovative teaching and learning philosophy, a culture based on effective teaching and learning that was sustainable over a period of time. He considered this as the secret to getting innovation to succeed: he believed that principals needed long-term, deeply thought out approaches to change.

Silos and innovation. PU posited that the Department has not yet moved into the innovation space:

> I think they still have silos, and because different directorates are still driving their agendas, different executive directors are still driving the things in their portfolios, I don't believe there is an integrated approach to all of that. (PU)

PW discussed how the structures needed to avoid "silos" and support innovative practice, saying that genuine SBM would see the school as a "module." However, the system was not designed for that, she said; the system did not see each school as being valuable in its own right. She continued, positing that NSW would do better in its pursuit of SBM, and that subsidiarity would generally be improved, if schools could be provided (or supplied) with appropriate guidelines. Summarising PW's views on this matter, we could say that innovation should be supported by structures that are flexible enough to adapt to and encourage change—this notion underpinned her ideas on schools as modules or franchises.

PT referred to the problem of a system that was trying to work with "all these different, fractured elements," noting that DoE structures could limit innovation at the school level, partly due to the effects of those structures on the cohesion of each level of

the total system. PS said that the system lacked appropriate leadership for a coherent approach. In his view, the DoE lacked not just leadership, but crucial knowledge and a willingness by all parties to work together. "Where was the sharing of purpose?" he asked, commenting that there seemed to be a lot of people who were more concerned about their self-interests. PS also remarked that the policy units within the DoE continued to operate as silos, and that "[t]he silos approach ends up with folk not knowing what the left hand is doing, or the right hand. One group doing something, another group overlaying that with something else."

"Wrong people in wrong places". The issue of poor design of coherence and inappropriate levels of subsidiarity are compounded, according to PZ, by DoE staffing patterns. She suggested that this is because the people who are attracted to these jobs are not necessarily of the calibre and educational experience that is required. She commented that most people in school-level positions, who do not want to do these roles, say, "'Why would I do that when I know what the [DEC] culture is, how I'd have to constantly deliver? I don't know if I can do that all the time'" (PZ). There appeared to be a perception held by PZ that substantially different professional cultures existed at the school and DoE level, and that this generated ongoing tensions.

PZ made it very clear that she saw a lack of school experience by supervisors and policy designers as a crucial issue underpinning the poor coherence and excessive centralisation that principals were experiencing:

> I would actually like to see some policy makers come out and spend a couple of days in schools to be quite honest. I would like them to come out and see the wellbeing issues that we're facing with our young people, the fact that the issue around extremism is something that we've had a kneejerk reaction to. In a secondary school in the middle years, we're in the prime space for kids being

radicalised. I would say, "Why don't you come in and walk in our shoes for a while?" The thing is, the world has changed. It's changing rapidly on the ground. I don't know that the policy makers can make those changes quickly enough to be able to best support us within schools. (PZ)

These observations from PZ suggest that the rapid pace of social change may be an indication (or reflection?) of the widening gulf between leadership priorities at the school and DoE levels. Relating to PZ's view, PV felt that there was an element to the current system's controlling mindset that was potentially destructive. Some principals reported that they were being harassed, and essentially told what to do and what not to do in their schools. This in turn reduced their confidence and their credibility.

Question 3: Could you please comment on what you perceive as the external constraints on school-based innovation, and particularly comment upon your capacity as principal to respond, to build a culture that suits innovation?

Innovative culture is difficult. PZ and PW both provided succinct "future views" in terms of this question. As previously noted, PZ posited:

This issue of building a culture suiting innovation, it's not an easy thing to do because you're not a rock, with no effect on you from the sea. You're being washed all over the shop. I think that's going to become the biggest challenge that principals are going to face over time. (PZ)

PW commented:

If you can't build a culture that supports change, then you fail as a principal if you want to make changes. If you want to keep it the same, just focus on

management, that's fine, but if you want to actually create real change, change

in how kids think about themselves, change in how teachers think about their

work, change in how your administrative staff work, all that stuff that's really

underpinning school-based management; well, if you don't understand that

change happens with people and you think it happens by sending out another

memo or another document, then you simply don't understand change. (PW)

To respond to the currently constrained environment, PZ believed that a

principal must scan the horizon and "sniff the wind." She said that too few leaders knew

how to teach people to sense opportunities for change. She thought that that skill came

from watching, listening, and looking for opportunities because you "never know where

an opportunity is going to come from." (PZ)

This idea, that people are central to system change and that they must be treated

as individuals, was a view held by a majority of participants.

"It's about how principals respond". In the current era, PT suggested that the

ability of school leaders to respond effectively required a broad range of skills

combined with inner strength, pragmatism, and determination because of the drivers and

impediments that were emerging from the system and the NSW Government:

You've got to think planted in reality. You've got to think planted with people,

with systems, with resources, with pragmatic considerations, and you need to be

able to marry all that together and say, "Okay, this is what we can do." (PT)

He believed that if you are going to put people in principal positions, you need

people who have core interpersonal strengths, communication skills and "nous"; people

who can actually see where they want to take a school, and who enjoy their job and

working with the people around them. You cannot have people who are "going to be

products of eighteen modules of management training before they get to the role," he said. Instead, schools needed people coming into principal positions who were "unifiers," people with the ability to lead people along common, agreed paths.

PV put forward a view of principal responsiveness to the current milieu as one that was both personal and pragmatic. He suggested that his ability to respond had been built out of a lot of understanding, of knowing what worked and what did not work, particularly in his local context: "You can't beat the system no matter how much you'd like to. You try to beat it by playing it; you don't beat it by embracing it." (PV)

PX thought that in terms of principal response, a lot of the focus had to be within your own areas of responsibility; you needed to be positive, particularly with your community and staff. He said that one upside of the endless compliance requirements was that it could "inform him" in some respects:

> [System demands] don't help you to respond; your capacity to respond, it's slowed up. So every time I've got to leave the site and do a compliance session, it's a day I could have then spent on getting stuff done. But you can't go off reservation. (PX)

PX continued, noting that school leaders needed to look for those parts of the compliance, accountability requirements, and reform pressures that assisted the staff (and the principal) to move forward; that is, to look for ways in which the requirements can be used in a positive way at the local level. PX said that a key step in principal responsiveness was to focus on the staff, to take the fear away from the staff by explaining to them that the school may have to be compliant but "let's make it part of our culture." He was adamant that changing the school's culture was crucial, as without it "you'll never get out from behind the eight ball."

PV wanted principals to have "genuine, comprehensive, and flexible" SBM as this could potentially engender improved outcomes. He contended that a major impediment to building a culture of innovation at the school level was a lack of principal authority and, concomitant with this, having little autonomy to select staff, to be entrepreneurial, to fundraise, or to provide incentives for his school to "go to another level." Under the constraints of the current system culture, structures, and policies, he believed that he had done nearly all he could in terms of reaching a desired state of excellence. He commented with some passion, "take the handcuffs off," and observed that, in his opinion, because he did not have sufficient authority or autonomy, it was not a "legitimate" SBM environment.

PT noted a currently high level of "management cynicism." He explained that this phrase referred to the generally accepted view among experienced principals that the system and its policies and support structures were not operating in a way that improved school effectiveness. He said that local action in key areas of school operations were at best not properly assisted, at worst retarded or even overturned, by ambiguous policies and unrefined reforms or support programs. Adding that his capacity to respond and build innovation was about the "nuts and bolts" of school management for learning, he explained that the system's people and its policies needed to be "managed" by principals if schools were to achieve the core tasks that led to student learning. In his opinion, the pursuit and effective application of such tasks needed to be grounded in local control.

PS sought to explore in his comments how a principal should respond to the positive and negative forces that they experienced in their professional role. He believed that his approach was different to that of many other principals and that this was borne out of his personal circumstances, his school context and history. In short, he said:

We largely ignore them [the external forces]. While this school remains as successful as it is, that gives me a lot more leeway. I think we can get away with things here that possibly others couldn't. It gives us an opportunity to push the boundaries probably a little bit more. (PS)

As tabled earlier PW posited that already advantaged schools, already successful schools, and schools with strong enrolments, had greater opportunity to obtain effective reforms and innovations than did their less advantaged cousins.

PS at times saw the current system in abstract terms, viewing it as a hierarchy that needed to be placated rather than a force for positive change. He stated that the capacity to respond depended on context, experience, and the drive of the principal. This included the capacity to ensure that the school could go through the system processes required, fully accepting the current compliance regimen, but then to get on with what they were actually doing that made a difference for students.

Indeed, this was a very common idea among participants. The exceptions were PS and PV who provided important comments relating to the current rapid turnover in principal roles. Their shared concern was that a less experienced, less empowered principal would spend too much time focussing on the minutiae and the "administrivia" that the DoE demands, thus letting inappropriate demands "filter" down to their staff. They believed that, in the longer term, this could reduce teaching quality. As PZ put it, staff would inevitably "feel the pinch and take their eye off the main game."

PY related an understanding of context and the leader's capacity to their personal qualities and purposes:

The innovations that I have achieved here that are particular to our context, that are driven by the needs of our local community, have been done in and around the system, tweaking the rules, not necessarily breaking them; although there

would be others who say I break them, side-stepping things, hurdling

bureaucratic obstacles and barricading myself against all of the bureaucratic

reasons, all the things that take away your creativity and imagination. (PY)

PW provided a view of how leaders respond to the challenges of leadership by

considering where the authority of the principalship should lie. She believed that there

were three sources of authority for NSW principals: community authority derived from

the local school context, system authority as a result of the position, and professional

authority, with the latter regarded as the most important source. PW saw it as crucial

for principals to have an entrepreneurial disposition, and if you want them to be

innovative, you have to pick people who are willing to "give it a run, who are willing to

see it differently, who can actually do it—improvement, which is one type of innovation

within the context of the current system." Principals had to be prepared to take risks,

shift cultures, and work in completely different ways; she said they needed to try things.

She believed that this approach was more important than ever because Australia has a

disruptive economy and because social media is continuing to impact many aspects of

life, and while a lot of schools understood this, "some people have a greater disposition

and greater courage to take it all on, head-on."

For PW, these kinds of personal characteristics were a key driver of professional

authority.

Mentoring. PT reflected on the issue of how the person and the position (of

principal) must align if local success was to be achieved. The current trends for

principal preparation, he said, were very much about generic training. In his view, this

inevitably focussed development more towards policy, compliance, and basic

management than to context-based, intuitive, respectful, and data-cognisant leadership.

PT stated that in terms of principal development, the current recentralisation would necessitate an expanded role for mentoring:

> Any applicant for a principal's position will [now] have to have completed 18 modules before they're eligible for the position. I can see that's going to be so much about centralised systems and understanding of finances on a centralised basis. I could be wrong here but I can't say that it's going to actually let [a new principal] customise and make their skillset fully realised and exploited for when they enter a context; that's where you need to have some mentoring. You need to be able to have people who are there to guide and support you. (PT)

In support of this idea, PV said that when the DoE put a leadership program in place, they thought it would solve most problems: "That's not the reality of running a school, it's the intrinsics of understanding emotional intelligence, around understanding the issues of the staff that you have at the school, of the timing of doing things, the gut feeling of your community." He added that these were not things that you could train for in a module or within a basic leadership program. For example, he suggested that principals needed a comprehensive understanding of the major matters operating within their learning community: "If I was talking to aspiring principals about what's important, I don't think I'd be talking about knowing how to access the DEC's website and how to do your staffing numbers and things like that."

In summary, PV believed that mentoring would be crucial for the efficacious pursuit of school leadership development because of the complex realities that that leadership would encounter. Such realities required support and advice from those who had previously been immersed in them.

PZ was concerned about inexperienced principals' development prospects in the current environment. She said that "time and space" was something that allowed the

principal to develop and added, "I don't know whether that time and space is going to be there for people in this new world." She continued:

> I think it comes back to your passion and your determination about what you want to do for the learners within your school, and community. When I say learners, it's not just the kids. It's the teachers, the staff that you've actually got in your school; to be able to move those along as well. I worry that what we're going to end up with is people who don't necessarily have the passion for what makes a difference within schools. Fullan years ago said you can't mandate what matters. We know that we can't have the thousand flowers blooming and all that. We've got to have some structure there. But if we take it, and we make it all accountability, what have we got left? (PZ)

Question 4: Could you please comment on the issue of coherent practice in the Department: how the processes, linkages, relationships, and information management systems help or hinder innovative practice?

What works? Here participants made thoughtful, positive suggestions and provided sophisticated but pragmatic analyses of the issues around coherence within the DEC:

> There isn't the coherent theme and mindset for SBM through the system, at school level, through to system level. I know that they sort of want it, they sort of want it, but they can't figure out how to deliver it and still be a centralised system. (PY)

PV saw coherence as being based on both structures and people, and he felt that experience teaches you how to learn to live with the deficiencies in your professional environment. It is "clunky and cumbersome but you can operate," he said and noted that it was all about "steadily building experience."

PT engaged with the same concept, once again referring to the "art of management" but now with reference to a leader's confidence. He said that principals should feel that they can tell their Public Schools Director that something they are being told to do "is a joke, is ridiculous" but that was not how things worked. Going further, PT noted that Directors were probably constrained in what they could say or do, and they would often covertly agree with their principal, but they could not articulate such contrary views because they were "the meat in the sandwich." This comment represents the communication disjunctions or breakdowns that all participating principals identified (to one extent or another) as occurring across the system, whether between DoE silos or between principals and their Directors.

Similarly, PW suggested that it takes time for any person to develop the skills, knowledge, and "nous" that underpins great principalship. She saw tension "all the time" between where the Department wanted you to focus your work, and where the community wanted you to focus your work. She said that right now, "we've got 60% of our principals in their first four years; we just have to give them a little more time and space, because around about five years they start hitting their stride."

Resources matter. PT said that when it came to resource allocation, principals sometimes had to trust their "gut feelings," with such feelings based upon years of experience, intuition, and the ability to read situations "pretty well." Genuine local control, he believed, was very important for school success because principals should be respected as high-level professionals. They should have the independence of people

who are paid to lead, make judgements, and be responsible for these judgements. He continued, discussing how such independence facilitates proactive, innovative approaches for his school and the application of resources to local need:

> I can make sure those resources are used to develop a system within this school which is unique, which is addressing the needs that I've got here, and it's actually promoting the sorts of things that are making learning relevant for our students today. If I was caught up in a much broader departmental generic system, then I'd be behind because it's not as efficient, it's not as bespoke, and it is not as responsive as what I've got as a system here. (PT)

He contrasted the local use of resources with the DoE application of resources, explaining how the inherent cumbersomeness and inefficiency of the latter affects him by creating a disconnection between the DEC's interpretation of effective resource use and the expectations of his community. PT said that the DoE approach to resource management slowed down the achievement of outcomes and created frustration for principals, communities, and staff:

> It creates frustration because they want to be able to see that they can have some input and they want to be able to see there is some tangible outcome at least within a 12-month period, and that's not happening at the moment. Then, when my staff talk to me about the need for assets upgrades, all these sorts of physical things, I'll say, "Yes, it's in the system, it's in process." In reality, I'm frustrated. Staff feel stymied because they're held back and their current working conditions of smelly carpet and ceilings and all those sorts of petty things that you have to deal with and you have to acknowledge that they're real but they're things that I can't control; whereas if I did have something which was much more responsive from the system or if I was able to have some sort of greater

local control, that would allay a lot of the fears and frustrations that my parents

have, that my staff have. (PT)

The overarching feeling from participants about this sub-theme was that there

was a pervasive inefficiency to the processes that the system used in its support of

schools.

Diminishing coherence. Referring again to the system's level operational units,

PZ believed that innovative practice was hindered by the lack of coordination among

the DEC's specialised school support units which behave as "silos". She used

accountability measures as an example of how the lack of coordination between support

units directly impacted on principals and their schools:

> There is absolutely no coordination at all for accountability processes. I see that
>
> as a huge issue in terms of principals having the confidence and the wellbeing to
>
> be able to innovate and meet kids' needs when you're dealing with that level of
>
> pressure. (PZ)

In a more concrete example, she recounted how, following a severe storm that badly

damaged many student and some staff homes, her attention was diverted from the

pressing need to support a community in crisis by the Department's insistence that she

deal with aspects of the school's performance results. She said:

> We've got that level at system that doesn't have any consideration for what's
>
> happening at the local level. I mean you know, that you've been in positions
>
> where you've seen people managing a whole range of issues, and all of a
>
> sudden, bang, something comes that they've got to respond to straight away.
>
> You know from knowing that person that you're not going to get the best
>
> response that's going to show exactly what's happening in that environment. In

the past, we could make those adjustments. We don't have that space to do that

anymore. (PZ)

PZ believed in matters where schools had successfully overcome a wide range

of difficulties through innovation and reform, there was often no system

acknowledgement of these processes or successes.

System policy and change. In terms of system policy and change, principals

expressed a spectrum of views about how this impacted innovation. PW and PZ were

both concerned about the impact of future policy design and implementation, and how

these matters could impact the implementation of complex school level innovation

programs. PW said that the DoE was trying to move the problems of policy design and

implementation for school level implementation forward, at least in some ways, but in a

typical response she noted that "they don't get it right, don't really understand how

complex it all becomes at the school implementation level."

PZ provided a more pragmatic perspective:

I guess that creative application of policy in the school doesn't mean to say that

you're not following policy, it just means that you're using the policy to its

best—I won't say full extent—but I'll say best extent.

In this light, PW related an innovative school culture to change processes. PW

believed that innovative cultures are rooted in a school leader's perception of how

change works:

As people know more, they understand more, they are able to work more;

they're actually able to change because they change the way they practice. Your

main job [as principal] is to build culture; you'll see pockets of innovation

emerge in response to local conditions. It's that much deeper management level,

of understanding the systems of how your school really operates, that I think is

underestimated by bureaucrats, because they don't have to manage kids. (PW)

As we can see from these responses, the participants consistently illuminated

matters relating to the dissonance, misalignment, and misunderstanding in school and

system cultures.

The following section details the responses to the participant-specific questions

provided during the Phase 2 interviews.

Phase 2: Responses to Participant-Specific Questions

PU was asked to expand on her views about a principal's capacity to "make the

hard calls." Why does an extended incumbency facilitate a principal's ability to make

"hard calls"?

PU answered:

I think it's about your confidence as a leader. I think [what] it's about [is] that

there is not too much you haven't seen. Then some new ideas come up and

you've got the confidence to say, "Okay, let's do it differently; let's turn it up on

its head." I think it just comes with… I think it's just the confidence.

PZ was asked about capacity building (for a principal), and about why it did not

develop quickly. What was the relationship between capacity building and an increasing

SBM environment?

PZ answered:

I'm seeing that when those changes [the current SBM reforms] do settle—and

they will—that the role of the principal I suspect is going to be very different to

what you and I experienced. Very, very different. I guess that has to do in some

cases around the supervisory processes that will be in place. I think it has to do with the school excellence, the whole excellence policy that will be in place. I see that has a lot to do with how that principal's direct supervisor is going to work with that person.

She also made a point about the value that local management groups could offer in terms of innovation. That is, where you had a group of principals from a range of schools within a geographic area—primary, secondary, and special (for example, a school dedicated to educating children with disabilities) – all working together, and even sharing resources. She noted however that the "new world" was unlikely to operate in this way:

> Say, for example, you'll have a secondary school, and you'll have the direct partner schools where they're all actually working together on a learning continuum from pre-school, or kindergarten, wherever the kid starts, all the way through. I don't know that the "new world" has got a space for that to happen as easily as it did in the "old world."

PY was invited to comment on the need to "break the rules" if a principal wanted to innovate. She was also asked to discuss how non-compliance with policy related to a principal's capacity to use personal processes to obtain reform.

PY answered:

> Anything to do with assets, I do myself, and I break the rules. I'm not even sure what the rule is. I think the rule is that if it's more than $30,000, I think you've got to get Assets to do it. I think that's the rule. See, I don't even know what the rule is now because I just ignore it. There would be nothing in this school that was half decent if I did not break the rules.

She indicated that this determination—to not observe all the rules and policy requirements—was indeed a necessary personal attribute that enabled a principal to lead reform and sustain innovation; however, she said principals also needed to be pragmatic, to be careful not to "pick a fight you would lose or that might generate disciplinary action against you should things go badly wrong."

PW was asked about her views regarding the need to facilitate cultural change in order for leaders to be effective. How might this relate to an increasing SBM environment?

PW answered:

[W]hat people do is based on what they think and believe. My goal is to get everybody to the level where you to get everybody to think and believe the same thing, and that's the power of leadership, in my opinion.

She continued:

[Even to achieve] something simple like how you structure your timetable to create extra professional learning time, you have to be able to really understand management culture, management structures, and management systems. Therefore, when you think about it, your main job is to build culture, but critical to that is your capacity to build really good management systems.

PT previously stated that the principal's position, in terms of innovation, required the drive to see things happening, rather than waiting or acquiescing to system level initiatives or "ticking boxes." He was asked to expand on this statement.

PT answered:

They [principals in difficult schools] are dealing with a whole different socioeconomic environment [to his own]. They're dealing with a whole lot of

different staffing profiles. They're dealing with communities that are at times resistant. That's where the people who have been appointed into those positions haven't necessarily been the people who will tick a box in terms of, "Yes, I've met all these requirements on paper." But people who have enough capacity— and I don't mean to use the word lightly—perhaps it's charisma or interpersonal strength and skills, to be able to win the confidence of a community of staff and students and the wider community as well... and [are] able to bring those [people] together so that there is a sense of authenticity and a sense of genuineness in where they're going and what they're doing [will succeed]**.**

PT had been working on panels for principal selection for schools that were very different to his own, sometimes for schools in low socio-economic circumstances. In relation to this, he discussed at length the issue of obtaining the right leaders for specific contexts, and said that the right person for a given context, over time, would have perfected the "art of management"; that is, having management skills that were comprehensive, even manipulative, and which were contextually appropriate. In his view, if principal appointments were really about the "best fit," then you might have a system of schools where people were universally good at contextual management, and you would expect a local focus and localised support from the system's management, economic, and political capacities. PT believed that that could be a great positive, driving change against a system's tendency to be excessively centralised.

PS was asked about early adopters of innovation, and the idea that current bureaucratic processes, in particular, the "one-size-fits-all" mentality of the DEC, caused problems for schools that were already successfully innovating.

PS answered:

The school management plan is the first place to start. That's everything that you do, where you're heading in the next 12 months. Suddenly we've all been cobbled into tiny little boxes in one particular area, really constrained by the DoE mandated new management processes. They're setting milestones that are linked directly to tiny little budgetary parts. You lose the vision if you're constantly concerned about the minutia and I think that has happened.

PV had previously discussed "legitimate autonomy" and related to this, "legitimate" consequences for performance standards. He had said that there would be no genuine reform in NSW within the current milieu of drivers and impediments. He linked this to what he saw as the "insipid" SBM approaches in NSW. PV was asked to expand upon these statements.

PV answered:

[I]t's really interesting because if you want to talk about a competitive market with non-government schools, [the system is] handcuffing us [principals]. They're handcuffing us to the door and they're providing carte blanche to these non-government schools to basically kick us in the teeth and we've got to compete in that environment. We don't care because we're a sort of a—how do I say it? We're a "take-all" organisation. We look after everybody. We've put that [unfairness] to the side and have gone, "Okay, we'll just do our best."

PV was concerned that the lack of a level playing field made the inevitable impediments to innovative practice harder to overcome for some schools than for others. This was compounded because in his view all education was now part of a very competitive environment.

The following section sets out the themes and concepts that were further refined during Phase 2.

Themes and Concepts: Phase 2

This section sets out four major themes developed through analysis of the Phase 2 interviews that reflect, refine, and consolidate the seven themes tabled in the previous chapter. The first part of this section aligns the four consolidated themes with the associated sub-themes that arose from the Phase 1 and 2 interviews. The four themes are then developed and explained in greater detail.

A Schematic: Themes and Sub-Themes from Phases 1 and 2

Theme 1: A failure of system reform?

- SBM—the Emperor's got no clothes!

- A centralised mentality

- Support for SBM reforms

- A network view of innovation

- Balancing SBM and system control

- Local workloads and accountabilities under SBM

- "It's about saving money, and politics"

- Deep transformation innovations

- A favoured innovation—STEM

- SBM is not the major developmental influence

- SBM can impact leadership development

- Innovation progress

- School culture

- "Wrong people in wrong places"

- Innovative culture is difficult

- System policy and change

Theme 2: Excessive system reforms; inappropriate, contradictory or ambiguous policies; operational inefficiencies; mandated yet often irrelevant actions; as well as the necessity of dealing with uncertainty: all these factors impede innovation.

- Staffing inflexibility

- Bureaucratic intervention

- Implementing and sustaining innovation is about people

- Blockages and irrelevances

- "Roles change: people don't"

- Examples of ill-considered policies and regulations

- Silos and innovation

- Resources matter

Theme 3: Positive drivers for change tend to be local

- System drivers, personal drivers, and beliefs

- The favoured approaches are possible, practical, and pragmatic

- Drivers of change

- University expertise and data

- Data is the key driver of innovation

- Theory as background

- Leadership practice is personal, morally grounded, local, and imperative

- Context supervision and management capacity

- Where should responsibility for improvement lie?

- It's about how principals respond

Theme 4: A lack of system wide coherence—the tri-level proposition, contradictory, ambiguous, subsidiarity, forces that might increase or decrease coherence—all these provide a frame that could assist or reduce site-level operational effectiveness.

- Trust and influence

- A lack of coherence

- Inertia and risk aversion

- Subsidiarity

- Mentoring

- What works?

- Diminishing coherence

Explanations Supporting the Themes

Theme 1: *A failure of system reform?*

- None of the participating principals saw SBM as a successful reform. At best, they saw SBM as providing *possibilities* for supporting site-based innovation. As such it could, depending on the circumstances, help schools to achieve some of their gaols but its efficacy was reduced because of system responses to the flexibility it offered.

- The trend towards increasing SBM through NSW's LSLD policy was not seen as delivering a great deal in terms of the promise of increased flexibility in schools. Participants claimed there was a pervasive ethos of centralised control. This strongly related to the principals' ideas that the current reforms lack substance, and they fall back on "one-size-fits-all" centralised thinking. "Unproductive" demands upon principals' time and energy were strongly

perceived as increasing as the result of new accountabilities and excessive demands for compliance. Ironically, the participants saw this as a consequence of increased SBM—a widely-experienced, system-level, maladaptive response to increasing local flexibility.

- Bureaucratic intervention could reduce opportunities for local innovation. In the participating principals' views, school improvement occurred best if principals "weathered" the changes, adapted, and overcame the regulatory overload, and then did what they thought really needed to be done.

- Competition for enrolments and the vagaries and caprices of parent choice were recognised as twin drivers of change and innovation, but a school's particular circumstances were clearly seen as impacting its ability to innovate.

- Trust in principals by the system and broader community was considered to be low and subsidiarity settings were seen by the principals as variable and opaque.

- A centralised system mentality continued to heighten tension for principals between the desire for increased local flexibility and the personal and professional factors driving school leaders.

- It was considered that SBM *could* be partially successful as a reform aimed at effective innovation and sustainable school improvement but that depended on the individual principal's capacity, their experiences, their view of purpose, and the context of their leadership.

- Due to the system's resourcing policies and detailed compliance rules, increases in SBM could generate financial management issues and tensions which was seen as making local leadership more difficult and complex. Effectively using and manipulating both system and school resources (including personnel) was seen as crucial to designing and sustaining innovation.

- The participating principals did not see SBM as the major developmental influence on their leadership journey. For the participants, it seemed leadership modification mainly came from what could best be described as "necessity built on capacity." There was an apparent disconnect between the general perception of the participants as to what leadership was and how it should operate in schools, and the reality of leadership for principals that were part of the large NSW system. System policies, community expectations, supervisory practices, and compliance requirements were seen as the root causes of disruption to locally effective practice.

Theme 2: *Excessive system reforms; inappropriate, contradictory or ambiguous policies; operational inefficiencies; mandated yet often irrelevant actions; and, the necessity of dealing with uncertainty—all these impede innovation.*

- From a principal's point of view, system and district accountabilities could be pointless in terms of school improvement because they generally did not consider the specifics of school context.

- System expectations and policies were seen to be constantly changing, generating uncertainty, and this was exacerbated by an excessive number of reforms.

- System and government reforms and initiatives could defeat sound local planning and pre-existing, often locally-effective practices and innovations in schools. Early adopters could see their programs damaged or lost by successive system mandates and new policies.

- It was recognised that current inflexibility in staffing practices could work against local innovation. This clearly generated frustration among participants. It

was accepted that there had been some improvement in this area but getting the right people and having flexibility (and sufficient funding) to employ them to meet specific needs and circumstances remained problematic for seven of the eight participants.

- Principal workloads were perceived as excessive and growing. Too much of a principals' work was seen as professionally unchallenging, time consuming and, in terms of processes that mattered locally, unproductive.

- The perceived lack of understanding by senior DoE officers about day-to-day school operations and how change was really achieved in schools was seen by the participants to have led to poorly designed system structures and unproductive and/or damaging managerial interference.

Theme 3: *Positive drivers for change tended to be local.*

- All eight principals posited that pockets of innovation emerged in response to local conditions and individual leadership skills, rather than as a result of coherent system or local area support. The system was perceived to have poor understanding of real-world change processes in schools.

- A principal's skill, capacity for leadership, experience, knowledge of context, sense of purpose and values; all these were seen as influencing a school's success. System and government policies and the principal's capacity to respond to these operated to dynamically influence site-based innovation. Reductions in principal effectiveness were perceived to be caused by a lack of coordinated support structures, poor top-down management processes and linkages, and the perceived unwillingness of the system to genuinely recognise the importance of local context.

- Successful innovation and reform at the school level was based on principal experience and capacity more than other leadership factors. Educational theory and university involvement were valued by principals in terms of assisting with particular operational deficits. However, while theory and research were recognised as influences, the participating principals did not see them as direct drivers of change. In terms of their professional reading and research, it was clear that this path was highly individual among the participants.

- Principal responses to perceived system deficits were biased towards the possible, practical, and pragmatic and were underpinned by using/manipulating the policies, processes, initiatives, people, and formulas of the system. "Managing up" was seen as a crucial skill for garnering success.

- Most participants saw 'policy' as something that need not be taken at face value; instead, it had to be "managed" to suit the principal's views and understandings of circumstances. Policy directives were seen by the participants as "open to interpretation" with a place for "creative" responses, strategic obfuscation, and where necessary, feigned ignorance. One participant was adamant that if she did not "break the rules," the prospect of progress at her school would be bleak. Unwelcome policy and dogmatic requirements were attributed to inappropriately experienced and qualified people in policy development and supervisory roles. Innovation should be a whole of organisation responsibility, yet the organisation's structures and financial arrangements, combined with ever changing policy requirements, were seen to effectively reduce the possible pathways to innovation.

- It was considered as potentially helpful if everyone in the broader organisation could agree on a common set of values, purposes, and beliefs to provide direction and influence change.

- The SPC and local groups of principals were seen as very important in supporting, initiating, and validating innovative action at the school level. Indeed, implementing and sustaining innovation was apparently very much about collegial interactions. The Department's prescribed learning modules for prospective principals were considered ineffective compared with sustained, thoughtful mentoring from experienced principals who had proven their effectiveness in real-world situations.

- Building an innovative school culture was seen as needing positive, contextually appropriate cultures and change processes. Innovative school cultures were rooted in a school leader's perception of how change worked their capacity to respond to the drivers and impediments in their professional environment.

Theme 4: *A lack of system-wide coherence —the tri-level proposition, contradictory subsidiarity, forces that might increase or decrease coherence—all provided a frame that could assist or reduce site-level operational effectiveness.*

- Coherence was not recognised as a feature of the current approaches in NSW. As political intervention and centralist policy intervention increased, there was a perception of ever diminishing concern for the legitimate, often complex, child-focussed issues that constantly arose at the school level.

- Successful innovation was seen as requiring principals to have a deep knowledge of local management requirements and nuances, relevant personnel, and local systems and cultures. The importance of this type of knowledge was

perceived as underestimated and under-recognised by system bureaucrats whose own knowledge was seen as sub-optimal by the participants.

- The Public Schools Directors (the district or area level managers) in the current structure were considered to achieve little in terms of supporting innovative practice in schools. The system's operational and support units (external to schools) were often perceived as insular, poorly coordinated, and organisationally "siloed". The participating principals experienced this as excessive oversight, duplication, and impositions that directly constrained and, at times, completely prohibited, local innovation.

- Participants offered a view that you needed to learn how to "live with" the system-derived deficiencies if you were to achieve real-world effectiveness.

Conclusion

In this chapter I refined and consolidated the themes used in the first two phases into four higher order themes, capturing the views of the eight participating principals in detail to build collective understandings of how SBM (inter alia) was impacting on their working lives and the success of their schools. They perceived the SBM policy as failing to deliver on its promise to provide schools with more flexibility and decision-making authority. The participants saw the lack of coherence across the broader DoE organisation as a major barrier to SBM because it increased principal workloads and constrained local innovation. They saw the Department's policies (specifically LSLD) as blanketed across schools and its directives as too numerous, prescriptive, and burdensome in terms of the growing number of imposts and accountabilities they said they were experiencing. In particular, there was a prevailing concern amongst the participants that the DEC's externally imposed mandates and accountabilities were

unresponsive to the specific contexts of their schools. The participating principals saw

the support they needed as coming from their collegial networks and advocated

mentoring from experienced colleagues as more relevant to effective principalship (and

the development of principals) than the advice of their supervisors or the Department's

prescribed leadership development modules. It seems ironic that the participating

principals considered their capacity to respond to the burgeoning compliance demands,

that they believed were a result of SBM, as being significantly constrained by the lack

of local flexibility and decision-making authority that should lie at the very heart of the

system's LSLD policy.

The Phase 1 and 2 interview protocols asked the participants to reflect in depth

on factors impacting the leadership of their schools. The Phase 3 interviews discussed in

the next chapter sought to widen discussion by asking the participants for their views on

broader educational and social issues and how these matters impact on their leadership.

Chapter 6 integrates the findings across the three interview phases to directly address

the research questions.

Chapter 6

Phase 3 Interview Results

The system's performance measures end up being measures of socio-economic

level rather than what they claim is being measured. (PW)

Introduction

This chapter reports on the information gathered during October/November,

2016, using the third interview protocol. Three questions were asked of each principal

during a telephone interview conducted with the researcher at a mutually agreed time.

All related to broad ideas or initiatives that had the potential to impact the participants

in terms of their capacity to lead their schools.

By way of a caveat, it is important to note that Phase 3 data collection did not

include PZ who, for a variety of personal reasons, was unable to contribute to Phase 3

during the available time window. PZ strongly contributed in Phases 1 and 2, and at

least some implications can be drawn from her previous responses to the broader issues

canvassed in Phase 3.

In the first part of this chapter, the participating principals' responses are organised under the three questions that were asked; sub-theme headings again help focus the ideas and concepts that the participants raised. This new set of sub-themes articulates with the four major themes developed from Phases 1 and 2. This chapter aims to provide even greater depth of understanding about matters relating to the research questions, and a window into the participating principals' broader professional environments.

In order to encompass these broader views, the style of questioning varied from the previous two protocols in that participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of matters that, by their nature, were broader in scope. While these matters were not directly related to particular schools, all had the potential to impact on an individual school's leadership practices. The participants' Phase 3 responses provide an understanding of the ways in which they are personally and professionally immersed in an extensive range of educational change forces that are both internal and external to their schools.

The participants were asked to respond to three key issues: a new Government instrumentality; the issue of principal trust and authority; and, media criticism of the management of the NSW public education system. Participant responses to these matters make up the first section of this chapter.

The second part of this chapter further develops the study's themes by positioning Phase 3 sub-themes relative to the four consolidated themes detailed in the previous chapter. The additional information that arose during the analysis of the Phase 3 data is expressed as a series of dot points supporting these themes. This process extended the four themes to now include a broader range of external influences. It

represents the final refinement and enhancement of the major themes that emerged during this research.

The final part of this chapter provides comprehensive answers to the research questions (the inquiry or Level 2 questions). These answers are based on the totality of the evidence gathered across the three phases and forms the basis for analysis undertaken in Chapter 7.

Before presenting the principals' responses to the Phase 3 questions, I will briefly explore some methodological issues specific to this phase.

Telephone Interviews

Phase 3 interviews were undertaken by telephone and digitally recorded with the participants' prior consent. Novick (2008) called for further research into the efficacy of different types of interviewing in qualitative research. Nevertheless, her study found that there was little evidence of distortion or data loss in telephone interviews. She was generally positive about the value of this interview mode, finding that "telephones may allow respondents to feel relaxed and able to disclose sensitive information, and evidence was lacking that they produce lower quality data" (p. 391). Novick (2008) continued, noting that "regardless of mode, interviewers need to develop strategies to feel comfortable, put participants at ease, and develop rapport" (p. 396).

Using telephone mode for this third phase, there was no apparent loss of quality or fidelity detected in the data compared with the previous face-to-face interviews. This is not to argue the equivalence of face-to-face and telephone interviews, rather, that in the context of the current study telephone interviews offered a feasible and cost- and time-effective methodology to gather a third wave of data. Importantly, the current study's telephone interviews were conducted following two extended face-to-face

interview sessions, conducted under strict ethical guidelines and with an open awareness of the researcher's professional standing in the educational leadership community. There was always likely to be open discussion and disclosure under these conditions, even when mediated via a telephone, and the data gathering appeared to work well within the context of the current study. After two rounds of face-to-face interviews I had already generated a substantial rapport with participants.

Responses to the Third Interview

The following material reports on the participants' responses to the Phase 3 interview questions.

Background information to support Q1. BOSTES (NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards) had had a generally sound reputation among the state's public school principals for a number of years. Its actions and influence was important to school operations at every level. Its original design was developed by the Government and DoE but the process included discussions with the representatives of a number of educational groups, including principals' associations. BOSTES covered all schools, private and public. It was announced during 2016 that BOSTES was to be renamed and re-tasked as the NSW Education Standards Authority (ESA). This new entity was described in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (August 20, 2016) as "a new, beefed up, independent education authority that will have power to close non-compliant schools and conduct random unannounced inspections." According to the article, the then NSW Minister for Education, Mr. Adrian Piccoli, talked about this new authority as having the capacity for "making schools and teachers nervous" (Munro, 2016, p. 5).

Question 1: How do you see this ESA initiative interacting with SBM and efforts to increase site-based innovative practice? What do you consider is the motivation for this change?

Performance measures may be politically driven. PW said that she was "alert but not alarmed." She felt that this new entity would increase the focus on system performance and compliance targets. She commented that there was great variation in the capacity of particular schools to meet external, often arbitrary, targets. She saw more arbitrary system targets as being the basis for the ESA change. She said that system performance measures ended up "being measures of socio-economic level rather than what they claimed was being measured."

As a specific example, she said that it was all very well to say that every student has to have NAPLAN Band 8—a controversial 2016 NSW government schools performance requirement from the BOSTES (Alegounarias, 2016)—before being able to obtain a Higher School Certificate (university entrance level) but this was very difficult in many low socio-economic schools, and that this meant little in any case, said PW, given that only 60% of the Australian workforce had attended school in Australia. Regarding ESA and the issue of inspections, PW pointed out that there have always been management reviews in NSW (effectively a focussed inspection of particular problems in a particular school) and the ESA legislation just continued this particular system capacity. Nevertheless, PW noted that processes such as management reviews could be damaging, unfair, and create political scapegoats; overall, such matters were at best a "can of worms" in real-world settings not least of all because of the potential to damage parent confidence.

Looking more deeply, the motivations for ESA type changes according to PW were simplistic and relied on chosen data sets and political dynamics that were often

driven by the media; they were rarely rationally driven nor were they driven by the profession. She was adamant that there were people and organisations behind government policy and government instrumentalities, such as ESA, who claimed that principals and teachers did not "know what they're doing." This type of rationalisation often provided an excuse for punitive or controlling measures. Problematically in her view, in terms of transparency and fairness, the ESA legislation enabled one group of people to review all schools. PW believed one factor that was operating behind initiatives like ESA was paternalism and believed that misogyny was still extant in the political hierarchy of NSW.

PY said political forces within the Government drove changes such as ESA. She observed that most schools should not be nervous because the system's practical approaches to this call for "closer management" of performance and standards would not match DoE or government rhetoric: operational realities and complexity would see to this. PY noted that there was always a complex interaction between policy and politics.

Considering a tangential issue, PV claimed that ESA was not about punitive inspections (at least for Government schools). "Validation" processes could be useful he said, particularly when combined with some of the system designed planning tools like the School Excellence Framework. He felt ESA type changes "lay more around teacher accreditation and management and the motivation for this change was really about "consistency of the accountability framework." PV said that this was a positive and that it was good to have systems of external validation for learning processes, but noted also that the ESA initiative was of low importance compared to some of the system approaches that dominated principals' time, often negatively impacting both school and principal effectiveness.

The correct focus. Extensive and excessive compliance and performance requirements that do not always matter for students and schools are unfortunately becoming the norm, said PY. Principals and schools who fail compliance measurements do so, not because of a "correct" focus on student outcomes, but rather due to unimportant matters of compliance. PX said innovation and support for it should come before compliance and the application of unproductive policy. Pragmatically, he noted that, in reality, principals usually backward mapped their innovative work to meet compliance requirements: "It is a show: you need to show you are meeting the regulations." He went on to explain that compliance was not what really mattered, and that it should not be the focus of his work effort.

PS believed that transforming BOSTES into a new authority was unnecessary and potentially damaging to the quality of system approaches to school governance. BOSTES had been locally and internationally "famous" for its work and systems, he said. He noted that BOSTES syllabuses were recognised as being among the best in the world (notwithstanding the current media concerns about the draft mathematics syllabuses). PS posited that it was worrying that the ESA as a governing body for schools may include no practicing educators and that one of the many indicators that the motivation for change was "entirely political"—that it was about controlling a Minister for Education who did not appear to be performing to the satisfaction of some members of his own party (Adrian Piccoli was replaced as Minister of Education in late January 2017). In summary, PS said:

> ESA has been ill thought out, ill-conceived, and done for all the wrong reasons.
> It's been done purely for political motivation. Of all the things that people have
> been concerned about in education and all the questions that are asked, not one

person has ever suggested that the BOSTES structure needed to be looked at, tampered with, or in any way pulled apart. (PS)

SBM and ESA: Contradictory, mutually beneficial, or parallel initiatives?

While LSLD was considered by PV to be a disappointment in terms of obtaining real SBM, he noted that ESA was a separate issue and, as reported above, he saw potential for positive outcomes. He regarded the validation processes that Government schools were being expected to undertake as part of ESA's remit as potentially positive experiences. He felt that these were not, in reality, "proper" inspections as some of his colleagues had claimed. PV saw the problem with ESA as being, that while ESA was potentially positive because it could provide consistency of accountability and registration for all schools, its enactment did not sit well with the system's attempts to have increased SBM and locally focussed control and innovation. This aspect of his view mirrored that of PT who saw the same contradiction. With the exception of PU, the participants generally saw the ESA initiative in this way—potentially positive but contradicting SBM reforms because ESA was yet another indicator of increased compliance requirements. PU was highly positive about the ESA changes, and did not believe they were contradictory to SBM.

Because of the LSLD policy, and now ESA, PW believed that in practice, SBM at school level now related to increased compliance and control and in the end, it meant workloads had become excessive. She said, "[T]here's been a tipping point reached, certainly in Victoria, where principals are saying, 'We just can't do any more.' Schools are feeling very overwhelmed by that high level of management." PW went on to explain that she believed that almost every system process in recent times was about compliance, control, and accountability, and that this was not supportive of local complexities and local management.

PT commented:

It [ESA] appears to be an attempt to increase regulation similarity between independent, Catholic, and public schools so that there is a degree of commonality in compliance requirements [but] it's all tangential to innovation within the schools. It [ESA] will take time away from schools and school leadership. I look at it in terms of the political context; I accept it in terms of the political context. If I look at it in terms of the spirit of LSLD, it's not really relevant at all. (PT)

PX commented that ESA, while potentially useful, could negatively impact innovation. This was because teachers and principals would not go "outside the box" under such scrutiny. In his view, performance control and effective registration procedures are needed but the management reality was that, on a day-to-day basis, reform and innovation—including teaching quality—should first and foremost be guided by teachers and students in their school context.

Further reinforcing his concerns, PS commented, "[T]he system can't cope with what it has created." The result, he explained, was that principals had increased workloads while at the same time operating under high levels of scrutiny. Using ESA as an example, PS said that the ESA rollout would have little influence on the day-to-day operations of most schools, and in this sense it was separate to matters of SBM. However, this type of unilateral action by system and government was not isolated and was consistent with increasing levels of accountability, compliance, checking, increasing regulation, and excessive principal workload. The ESA legislation exemplified these sorts of changes and inevitably drew focus away from contextually suitable innovation.

Increasingly mandated workloads reduce local energies. PW provided a broader explanation as to why principals found it difficult to continue responding to new system compliance requirements and regulations while managing for local needs. She said that the DoE was, in effect, managing locally *for* principals because of the excessive number of policies and the current milieu of rigid policy application. As a result, principals were not able to pursue genuine SBM. In practice, it was a case of system-mandated workload bias where teaching and learning could not be prioritised. She said there had been huge cuts to corporate and central staffing, but many of the agreements (such as those with the unions) that principals were required to follow, substantially increased principal workloads. For workload at school level to be bearable, in her opinion, far more external administrative staff were needed and that would not happen; worse still, the silos that remained in the DoE reduced overall efficiency in the organisation, further adding to local workloads.

PX noted that there had been a "quantum shift" in how the system interacted with schools. He said it was no longer about guidelines: "everything" was regulated or needed permission, yet the Public Schools Directors knew less about schools than they used to because they did not often visit principals. Importantly, PX related this "shift" in power to constraints on learning at the school level. In terms of innovative learning practices, the ESA changes did not:

> fit in with learning innovation in any way shape or form. They're [DEC] saying that "students have changed, learning has changed, you must change your pedagogy," but [on the other hand] "you must comply and satisfy the requirements," which are based on very rigid and strict guidelines that have nothing to do with individualised learning. (PX)

PU, also concerned about workload requirements, said that the SPC had data about all the reforms coming from the DEC, and how these reforms might lead to excessive school-level demands. She claimed that this data demonstrated that there was a "bevy" of reforms in 2016, further adding to the reforms of 2015, 2014, and 2013. The SPC information indicated too much reform, too high a pace of change, insufficient attention given to principal workload, and little coordination. She said it was crucial that this situation improved because it was now almost impossible for principals to focus on the core business of teaching and learning. One particular irony, she noted, was that even getting a business manager to assist with workload necessitated a great number of bureaucratic processes.

Question 2: Can you please comment on what you perceive as your level of authority for site-based decisions in the current NSW SBM environment? Within your comment, could you include discussion of how such authority (or lack of authority) could extend to decisions and positions that relate to moral concerns, or conflicted situations?

Trust, influence, and principal practice. In Phases 1 and 2 the issues of trust and authority to make local important decisions were of concern for a number of participants:

> I think we're allowed to have authority as long as it doesn't go pear-shaped, and that's the fundamental issue. If it goes pear-shaped, I really don't believe that the DoE would support us and therein lies the dilemma for us because our decision-making is based on local context, upon what we know about situations as opposed to the rules and regulations. (PV)

PX said that the LSLD initiative increased principals' responsibilities yet the level of trust in principals shown by the system had decreased. Like PV, he noted that there was only trust in a principal "until something goes wrong." The underlying problem was that the system was bureaucratic, not client focussed, he said. PY commented on this bureaucratic focus noting that all too often, in her opinion, such a focus was really about a senior officer's "self-preservation." PV and PX gave examples of excessive regulations that transcended trust and both made it clear that there was little scope for local authority. PV said, "I've been a boss [principal] now for 15 years and I still don't feel that I'm trusted… an absolute lack of trust. If you said to me what's the difference between when I became a principal in 2002 and now, I would go that I've actually got less control, ironically, than I felt that I had then." PV's comment indicates a perception shared by many of the participants that the system's trust in its principals was actually decreasing over time.

PY said one way to deal with the deficit of trust was for principals to be "very low-key, very low profile" so that any problems or issues that might arise at her school would be less obvious. She claimed that increasing overregulation was draining on principals and schools, and that "it's a weight, and it's getting worse." Principals coped by finding shortcuts, by breaking the rules, and by quietly ignoring policy, and these actions allowed principals to focus on their core business. She indicated that she was having to do simple, low-level bureaucratic jobs that she should not be doing and this did not help her to achieve her purposes:

> Generally, I feel that I am now being charged with chasing up all the
> bureaucratic things that need to be done and they're only going to protect [the
> bureaucrat's] back… I just think, "What's the intent of the core business?" (PY)

PU posited that school operational flexibility can only work within the policy frameworks of the DEC, and that principals needed the DEC's footprint of policy and procedures:

> I think we are still DoE employees, we're still charged as principals with the responsibility of following the DoE rules and policies. I don't think we can "flex" those because the policies are a source of truth and that's what we need to adhere to. In terms of my level of authority, I believe that the flexibility is now in how we operate our school within guidelines and policies, for example, the authority to employ additional staff, in many schools a business manager. So really, the amount of authority is in the way we go about our business. (PU)

Notwithstanding this view she took the view that policy "could not exist for every eventuality" and individual principals must often decide what they wanted to do about moral positions. She explained:

> It's about principals following policy but not blindly, maybe taking a stand because the current policy hasn't kept up with changing social mores and challenging… but in the end I don't see that as LSLD, I see it as a need to challenge the DoE about something where it hasn't kept up to the trends in society. (PU)

Taking a different position, PS posited that the system had a rapidly increasing ethos of risk aversion and he claimed that other government departments had also found that there had been increases in regulation. The actions and/or regulations of other government departments—both Federal and State—at times did impact schools so the regulatory environment seemed to him to be increasing. This "micromanagement" that he felt stemmed from more constraining policies, supervisors, and influences that arose

outside of schools, was evidence of an enormous lack of trust and the steadily decreasing authority of principals.

PT offered an important practical example. He said that it was a system responsibility to provide effective management tools for schools and it had failed in this crucial area, citing, as an example, the seven years of ongoing problems with the LMBR initiative. Such difficulties further diminished principal authority, he claimed, because principals had to be fully across their local financial position if they were to innovate and do so with credibility. LMBR's "incompetence" had muddied the water in terms of the financial authority of principals; PT viewed this "incompetence" as another example of a lack of system thinking about trust and authority.

"Us and them". PW saw the matter of trust in a broader context claiming that there was little trust either way between principals and policymakers or DoE senior officers. An "us-and-them" paradigm was embedded in the collective view within the organisation. She claimed that many experienced principals did not think that many of the senior officers and policymakers were competent and that "experienced principals don't trust them to make decisions." She noted:

> In terms of LSLD, [a particular senior officer] was never going to give up
> control to the schools. He doesn't trust schools and that's because he's spent half
> his life dealing with the people [in schools] who stuffed up so his worldview is
> shaped by that. Fundamentally there isn't trust, and there isn't trust the other
> way either. It [trust] is worse now… when I go to principals' meetings it's not so
> much that they distrust the people they are working with, it's whether the people
> working in the DoE are competent. (PW)

She also noted that a moral position often needed to be made clear by way of explanation for a principal's decisions and, since societal ambiguities ensured that

difficult decisions had to be made, when it came to such difficult and/or contentious decisions, principals were expected to "always stand on the high moral ground," even if this conflicted with a DoE policy position. In this space, the pressures that principals could be subjected to were reason enough to have a strong and representative SPC whose elected officers could speak for individual principals and more broadly for the principalship and the profession. The SPC could speak on moral positions and issues of unfairness, and this included policy unfairness, whereas individual principals may not feel comfortable to do so. If individual principals did provide what could be interpreted by senior officers or politicians as negative or abrasive commentary, they could be "singled out" for criticism and censure.

PU agreed on the important role of the SPC to help overcome deficits in individual principal authority and PX identified a nexus between trust and authority: "without one, you can't have the other," she said. PS held a similar view, adding that when it came to trust it had to work "both ways." PT said principals were not trusted by the system and without trust SBM would end up "being a sham" while PU also saw an important role for the SPC. PX noted:

> There is trust until something goes wrong… for one of our programs here I know that even if I follow every DoE policy and procedure requirement to the letter, there would still be consequences [for problems]. So, there is often a great deal of risk if [you] look at, you know, innovation… to meeting all the needs of the kids. Private organisations tend to do things for the benefit of the client; [the] government approach [es] things out of fear of what could happen. (PX)

Background information to support Q3. In 2016, the then new Education Secretary, Mr. Mark Scott, was appointed to lead the NSW DoE. At this time, an opinion piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (2016) stated that "the education system

remains creaky and bureaucratic, full of anachronistic work practices. Mr Scott will need to chip away at that entrenched culture to ensure the Department and our schools better reflect modern workplace orthodoxy, to give our [NSW] students the best chance at success" (n.p.).

Question 3: If it is desirable to have site-based innovation, what actions should the new Secretary be undertaking? In respect of this, does the SMH opinion piece hold water?

Possible improvements lie in cultural and personnel change. All participants agreed to a greater or lesser extent with the SMH view: that there *was* of a lack of modern workplace orthodoxy, entrenched negative cultures, and a dated bureaucracy (or at least, this was how some people might see it, observed one participant). All agreed that there were anachronistic work practices.

PS said the new Secretary's first priority should be to rid the system of a culture of punishment, nepotism, and risk aversion. The Secretary, he believed, needed to reduce the number of talentless and sycophantic men and women, and increase the number of competent, courageous officers who would give frank and fearless advice; and, the more people with significant school experience in senior officer ranks the better. He acknowledged that such fundamental change would be extremely difficult to achieve and it would be at best a complicated process. He considered the problems and solutions as anything but simple because the system had too much bureaucracy exacerbated by too few people of competence in key positions.

PT said problems such as those described by the SMH opinion piece were typical of large organisations, and that it was difficult for senior management to fine

tune their bureaucracies (never mind fundamentally change them) because there were so many intransigent people and entrenched interests.

As previously tabled, PW took the view that "*schools* are not broken; they are doing a great job" but posited that this was rarely articulated and that it needed to be. She believed that in reality:

> Schools don't have enough support locally… most schools operate now pretty much stand-alone… but what we do have are very, very large Directorates [system support units] that are really dealing with the interface to the external strategic partners, funders, vested interests, political interests and they [the Directorates] don't have much time to do much else. There is an entrenched culture but it is an entrenched culture that I don't think he [Mark Scott, the Education Secretary] understands. (PW)

PX suggested that everyone who now works within the system should be looking for what was useful to directly support schools in their work, taking into account context. This should be the compliance focus of the system, he said, and he cited the School Excellence Framework as an example of what could be achieved. PV took a similar line to PX, noting his advice to the new Secretary would be to intervene to stop the excessive supervision, accountability, "handcuffing," and endless policy rollouts while maintaining support for principals by continuing things such as the DoE legal unit and the School Excellence Framework:

> There are layers of bureaucracy that are really important because they support and protect principals; like your media unit, your legal unit. These support units provide advice, they don't provide barriers. And the problem with some other parts of the [DEC] governance of schools… is that they don't provide advice, they provide supervision, and that's really a massive roadblock for us. (PV)

PY spoke forcefully on this issue, pointing to a lack of what she believed was appropriate focus. She said that the "DoE should be as rigorous on half-baked, incompetent teachers as it is on someone missing their anaphylaxis training. I wish we were as vigilant about teachers' capacity to teach as about their capacity to jab someone in the leg with a needle."

PT said too few people in power in the system understood that "schools are about relationships, people, and ideas, and you need to promote positivity about schools," in this way agreeing with PW. He also suggested that what was needed was a scaffold for how schools could operate that promoted student and teacher self-worth and supported curriculum innovation at every level, while also promoting future skill development.

This section has reported on principals' responses to the questions asked during Phase 3. Phase 3 questions focussed on broader issues than Phases 1 and 2 as a way of contextualising and deepening our understanding of the participant's perceptions about external educational ideas and initiatives that could affect them. The following section explores the Phase 3 contributions to the four major themes (that were set out in the previous chapter). Associated dot points reflect and summarise key concepts and ideas that appeared in participant statements during Phase 3, thereby adding breadth and depth to each of the themes. The Phase 3 data was broad ranging and complex and has been presented in this chapter through a combination of the information delineating the participants' perceptions tabled above, and the dot points below that relate to the major themes.

The Contribution of Phase 3 Data to the Themes

The contributions of the Phase 3 data are provided in dot-point form here to convey to the reader summary information from the data in relation to the four major themes.

Theme 1: *A failure of system reform?*

Relevant Phase 3 sub-themes:

- Performance measures may be politically driven

- SBM and ESA: contradictory, mutually beneficial, or parallel initiatives?

Participants posited:

- Political influence could often move policy towards non-essential (in the participants' eyes) requirements, as DoE officers responded to politicians or simply decided on initiatives that were ill-conceived. System policies and government initiatives did not properly allow for school context.

- The shallowness of system thought about the aggregation of disadvantage in particular geographical areas has led to accountability measures that reflect a school's socio-economic status more than other factors.

- Principals overcame the impediments "caused" by overregulation by "backward mapping" their innovative approaches to ensure compliance requirements had apparently been met.

- Depending on the participant, ESA was of value because it could provide a framework that assisted consistency of accountability and registration for all schools. Some participants believed that SBM was being "swallowed up" by increases in bureaucratic accountability, typified by initiatives like ESA.

Theme 2: *Excessive system reforms; inappropriate, contradictory, or ambiguous system policies; operational inefficiencies; mandated yet often irrelevant actions; and, the requirements of dealing with uncertainty—all these impede innovation.*

Relevant Phase 3 sub-themes:

- The correct focus

- Increased mandated workloads reduce local energies

Participants posited:

- When system reforms were implemented, they often generated tension between the reform's particular demands and a school's attempts at local improvements; this was because of the finite capacity of those leading schools. Compliance was not what really mattered, and it should not be the *focus* of a principals' work.

- While ESA had significant positive aspects, seven participants believed part of its purpose was about control and in that sense it demonstrated a lack of trust of school leaders. It had the potential to be more concerned about what mattered to those working outside schools than what mattered to students and teachers within schools. In other words, reforms like ESA *tended* to reduce innovation because teachers and principals generally adopted risk-averse behaviours under centralised scrutiny.

- PS's observation that "the system can't cope with what it has created" indicates that in his view, the system's overall approach to the proper governance of its schools was failing. PX said the intent of the ESA initiatives was to set an agenda for principals that was alien to their purposes, purposes such as the crucial task of instituting individualised learning in their schools.

Theme 3: *Positive drivers for change tended to be local*

Participants posited:

- An undertone of concern was identified in four of the participants' statements in terms of the potential cost to a principal's standing if they made statements on moral positions and/or issues of policy unfairness. This was due to potentially negative responses by senior officers and politicians who might want to retreat to the safety of policy. In their responses, participants implied that for some senior officers and politicians it was not a matter of right or wrong, or even what was reasonable in the circumstances. It became about their survival in a punitive culture. With regards to this, there was universal support from all participants for the role of the SPC in expounding and explaining the moral and policy positions of the principalship, as without that voice and professional support, individual principals could feel exposed.

- Fundamental changes in the system's own ineffective bureaucratic and anachronistic practices (as perceived by the participating principals) was required and indeed, in their view, such changes were urgent; media criticism along these lines was by no means unfounded. Cultural change for a large system would be very difficult for its leadership but that was a crucial way forward that could greatly assist principals' capacity to respond to contemporary educational issues, and to do so within the needs of their particular context.

Theme 4: *A lack of system-wide coherence —the tri-level proposition, contradictory subsidiarity, forces that might increase or decrease coherence—all these provided a frame that could assist or reduce site-level operational effectiveness.*

Relevant Phase 3 sub-themes:

- Trust, influence and principal practice

- "Us and them"

- Possible improvements lie within cultural and personnel change

Participants posited:

- The sub-text from the majority of participants was that an ethos of "us and them" was deeply embedded and paradigmatic to their perceptions. This situation appears to be born out of a pervasive lack of trust. Participants pointed to system approaches to subsidiarity that were poorly conceived, contributing to the "us-and-them" binary. The principals' perspectives here suggested that there was inadequate system planning and support, and there was a need for a more coherent approach to change throughout the organisation.

- Diminishing coherence was directly related to issues of authority and trust. The participants were in common agreement that principals were not really trusted by the DoE and that this ultimately led to reduced levels of local authority. One participant discussed the "quantum shift" away from what had been a solid organisational focus on learning to a view of the necessity for control over other matters.

PW commented that misogyny had played an important role in the recent controlling, compliance-based actions of the DoE and Government. Some senior officers and politicians apparently believed that the education workforce was dominated by women and that they "had no idea what they were doing."

The Research Questions: Answers from the Data

Question 1: What are principals' perceptions of the current drivers or impediments to change as they lead in a SBM environment?

Seven of the principals interviewed did not view the system's SBM reforms as delivering a coherent SBM environment. The eighth principal believed that the system's reforms were genuinely trying to support increased SBM, albeit further system efforts were necessary. In this principal's view, embedded within the LSLD reforms were sufficient flexibilities to overcome what had previously been significant roadblocks to change. This included matters such as some increase in staffing flexibility, the authority to use school monies to employ people or to make changes to organisational structures such as a school's executive. This principal's school was however an LSLD school and therefore had increased flexibility as a result.

All eight participants perceived the highly pervasive, centralist, and excessively controlling nature of the NSW public education system as the main impediment to SBM reform, although there were degrees of severity evident in respect of this view among the participants. PT took the view that LSLD was perhaps a type of encouragement for principals, in that at least the system recognised that changes to support school management might be needed. PV noted as a crucial issue the "real" lack of devolution of power. PS was adamant that the promised flexibility/freedom/autonomy had not been delivered by SBM, adding, "the Emperor's got no clothes." PU thought that there were more gains than losses in having SBM, even in spite of the current controlling system responses to the initiative. All participants gave examples of useful system and supervisory initiatives but the interviews confirmed that, in general, many system initiatives and regulations added unneeded complexity, distracted from student

outcomes and teacher effectiveness, or became lingering failures that over time depleted principal authority, credibility, and energy. Indeed, the array of compliance requirements combined with system inertia and its fear of releasing central control were seen as key factors increasing principals' workloads. Increased compliance reporting and an ongoing tightening of accountability were seen as endemic negative issues by seven of the principal participants.

All participants were in accord that many of the performance measures applied to schools were politically driven and viewed some of these measures as educationally indefensible. Counterintuitively, system responses to SBM were seen to have effectively reduced the time, commitment, and energy of principals to innovate. This was because of a bureaucracy that was too risk-averse to facilitate genuine SBM and allow local innovation. These issues had been exacerbated by what the principals perceived as an embedded, systemic "silo" mentality that pervaded many aspects of their work. DoE support units that were tasked with assisting schools were too often in conflict with each other or even more concerning to participants, their policies sometimes contradicted each other. Participants gave a wide range of examples of ill-considered and contradictory policies and regulations that in their opinion, had frustrated not just local initiatives, but some of the system's initiatives as well. More worryingly they said, the resulting operational problems were perceived to be negatively impacting students and staff. There was clearly a significant tension for the principals between being able to decide actions locally and the increasing level of "controlling" forces external to their schools.

The ESA legislation raised concerns that it would draw attention away from contextually suitable innovation in schools in favour of poorly conceived common solutions. Nevertheless, six of the principals were positive about aspects of the ESA

change, particularly the ability to ensure the commonality of compliance registration across public and private systems. Most saw the formation of the ESA as a separate or tangential issue to SBM, aside from its potential to further increase their workloads. Two principals expressed a minority view that the ESA legislation was a retrograde step that demonstrated a lack of system understanding of operational matters.

Excessive regulatory control, lack of trust, ineffective leadership devolution, excessive check-boxing and compliance monitoring, "one-size-fits-all" thinking, as well as a deeply ingrained money saving ethos were all seen to work against site-based flexibility and innovative practice. Six of the participants held the view that the system's deeply ingrained and pervasive lack of trust in principals had significantly reduced their site-based authority and thus constrained their innovative practice. All participants posited, to a greater or lesser extent, that the focus of system efforts was increasingly misplaced. Nevertheless, they believed that they openly ignored the regulations and accountabilities placed upon them at their peril but that did not mean that they always followed system requirements. They saw it as incongruous that principals were not trusted and endlessly scrutinised, yet many, if not most, public schools achieved significant outcomes often exceeding what might be expected given their cohorts' socio-educational standing. PW claimed: "schools are not broken; *they* are doing a great job," her clear implication being that the system was not.

Participants believed that drivers of site-based innovation were often personal and situational, and related directly to the principal's capacity, experiences, and knowledge but rather less to policy, particular system personnel, or DoE support units, like Assets. Current supervisory structures and subsidiarity settings were at best not conducive to innovative practice, at worst, impediments. It was generally accepted that a coherent (tri-level) approach to reform and innovation would improve opportunities

for site-based innovation. The participants felt that this would require well thought out revision of principal authority that would genuinely uphold principals as crucial leaders and true professionals. The capacity of any given school to innovate was seen as heavily dependent on its socio-educational and financial circumstances, as well as how effectively the school's leadership could respond to positive drivers and impeding forces. For example, competition for enrolments and the vagaries of parent choice were recognised as two important drivers of change that could affect a school's ability to innovate because these matters underpinned a school's financial position.

Participants noted that their student, staff, and community needs did not always align with the system's views of what mattered and where work effort should be concentrated and, because of this, SBM could not reach its potential. Direct interventions from government compounded this problem. Participants said system expectations changed constantly, generating uncertainty, and that this was exacerbated by an excessive number of reforms. Local planning was not valued and there was a lack of understanding about the day-to-day operations of schools by many senior officers and politicians. Seven participants indicated that they believed an "us-and-them" mentality was deepening throughout the public education system, representing a growing chasm between those people working external to schools, and those operating within them.

Question 2: What theoretical and practical approaches are principals using to design, implement, and maintain innovation in their schools?

Effective people, from both inside and outside schools, contributed to designing, implementing, and maintaining innovation. A principal's leadership, management experience, theoretical and practical understanding of schools, and collegial support

networks, were seen by participants as strongly associated with successful school-based innovation. Participants indicated that key skills included; an ability to seek, understand, and use contextual information; the capacity and confidence to involve a wide range of stakeholders (including university researchers) when and where necessary and; an-in-depth understanding of how a school leader could "manage" those aspects of system operation that might impede their innovative works.

A clear vision of where a school should be going was considered the responsibility of the principal, but the environment that the system's policies built could either enhance or diminish the chances of a particular vision being achieved. Principals did not see themselves as always aligned with system officers and politicians in terms of educational purpose. The outcome of this lack apparent of coherence was that the design and implementation of innovations at school level could result in conflict. Success in innovation, participants said, required that a wide range of practical, personnel and, to a lesser extent, theoretical factors were all working in concert.

Overall, the number of external positive drivers that helped schools to obtain and maintain increased levels of site-based innovation were few. The view of the participants was that principals must develop the ability to see, and justify through theory and/or practical experience, effective forward pathways, explain these to the relevant stakeholders (especially their staff), and then pursue their implementation. One important and supportive factor for principals was their strong and active professional association; the SPC. The participating principals indicted that this organisation was important in supporting, sometimes initiating and sometimes validating innovative actions in their schools. Its existence provided confidence for local actions. It provided a powerful voice that an individual principal could not achieve but also, the SPC could

provide a modicum of protection for a principal who was being castigated because they had stepped outside policy or disagreed with supervisory views.

Question 3: How is evidence used, and what data sources are used, to identify, monitor, and evaluate the change efforts in SBM?

System data was considered to stand alongside local data and other sources of evidence to identify needs and support reform actions. Data was universally seen by participants as of vital importance for reform and innovation in schools. The participating principals said they had to remain on the "boundary of change," implying a need for constant evaluation, a willingness to lead change, and acceptance that ongoing change would always be required. A broad range of relevant data could improve decision making. A culture of innovation was recognised as difficult to establish and maintain because school leaders did not work in isolation from society, governments, unions, the system's policies, their supervisors or their local communities. All these entities, either directly or indirectly, demanded both input and/or control and could—and often did—interpret data and other evidence differently to a school's leadership. As a result, a principal's local planning could be challenged and there could be disagreements about the required directions for improvement.

A perceived requirement for local success was organisational and decision-making flexibility. Following the monitoring and evaluation of a particular initiative, if a school needed to change direction, principals had to have the will, capacity, and flexibility to do so, and they needed to be supported in their actions. However, genuine understanding and support for principals was considered to be lacking; indeed, the participants reported that this was not a strength of the NSW system. Initiatives designed by schools were sometimes viewed through a risk-averse lens as problems to

be contained rather than pathways to local success. If initiatives were system driven, then they were deemed to carry more weight than school initiatives, thus reinforcing an inbuilt bias against localisation. System planning was poorly conceived, ad-hoc and, frustratingly, too often it over-rode local school plans.

The resourcing levels within a given school were seen by participants as important but not necessarily as an insurmountable blockage to innovative change but, given the current level of resourcing of government schools, to be able to use available resources both flexibly and effectively was seen as crucial. Far too often said participants, no genuine flexibility for resource use at school level was available. This lack of local resource flexibility was exacerbated by the vagaries of DoE policy, political interference, and the impact of educational sector groups who had the Government's "ear" such as unions. This generated frustration, especially when the participating principals said that they could show data and other evidence that identified urgent needs and required new directions for their schools but were unable to take action. The frustration was increased because of ill-conceived, ineffective management systems, particularly those that related to financial control like LMBR.

Many of the participants believed that system officials could be strongly influenced by external "players" such as politicians and media personalities. This reality could translate into unfocussed, peripheral, unwanted, superficial, and micro-managed initiatives that could accomplish little in real-world school environments. Participants also called into question the competency of some senior DoE officers suggesting that self-interest played a role in their decision making.

Question 4: Have the principals changed or modified their leadership practice in the SBM environment?

It appeared that SBM had not significantly modified principals' leadership practices. They reported that they were still growing professionally, albeit in a diverse range of ways and due to a diverse range of pressures. The data indicated that this learning journey depended very much on the individual principal. Generally, principals took the view that the current SBM reforms had not greatly changed their leadership practice although SBM did require particular skills and that this could point to particular areas for development.

In essence, participants took the view that school leadership by necessity, was often centred on the capacity of the leader to respond to a myriad of forces and factors, including using positive drivers effectively, and managing impediments to change. Participant responses almost always pointed to school leaders needing to have the capacity to understand, manipulate, and manage a plethora of influences including system policies and key people. The participating principals said they needed to have a deep understanding of their particular contexts and that this understanding developed over time. Seven participants claimed that leadership for innovation was not made easier because of the system's reforms and policies, including SBM reforms, partly because of the varying contexts of schools. Indeed, those varying contexts provided an uneven playing field for principals to gain from managing locally, because SBM could provide more gains in socio-educationally advantaged schools.

The participating principals said that as political intervention, accountability, compliance requirements, and policy control increased, the system demonstrated decreasing concern for the crucially important, albeit complex, child - and staff - focussed matters that continually arose for school level managers. Such concerns meant

that principals had to have high level leadership skills and be clear and courageous about their purposes. Broad-brush and system-led approaches to the development of prospective principals were considered inadequate by the participants, as people who developed toward obtaining principalship in this way were unlikely to understand, embrace, and promote the necessary types of leadership that could succeed in the pressurised, real-world settings of current schooling.

The current level of coherence within the DoE was considered by all participants as inadequate. Local improvements were seen as a result of the drive and determination of an experienced principal who understood their context, one who had learned how to overcome, or at least manage, a range of impediments. Innovations emerged in response to need, local conditions, and principal skill, not generally because there was an effective and supportive system helping drive change. It seemed that the leadership of innovation was really more about leadership experience as well as about having the "backbone" to "stand up" for local needs in the face of a broad spectrum of pressures, ambiguities, regulations, and policies.

Participants reported that collegial support networks were of central importance to their leadership development and indeed, to the effective preparation of prospective school leaders. These networks helped the participating principals to "work around" the system structures, policies, processes, ambiguities, and unhelpful senior officers who could otherwise impede their efforts.

A particularly interesting view about leadership that developed with experience was discussed by two of the participants. This was termed "active management," of themselves and their workloads, as these matters interacted with their particular leadership and context. This could and, depending on the individual, sometimes did, involve "selectively filtering" policy, deliberately ignoring instructions, obfuscating

actions (with the level depending upon their supervisory situation), and where necessary, seeking the support of their parent body. Furthermore, at least with the support of the SPC, this could mean being willing to take public positions about contentious system and government policies, as well as being willing to take and justify the moral position that underpinned a particular decision.

Effective principal preparation was becoming imperative, participants said. Such preparation needed to have a realistic SBM component and the findings drawn from this thesis would suggest that learning modules and fixed courses (while potentially useful) may only partially deliver what is needed. Rather, mentoring from experienced, innovative principals who have pragmatically met the many challenges to being effective in context was identified by the participants as a vital necessity. Hess and Kelly (2007) noted that "in this new era of educational accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matters more than ever" (p. 2).

Discussed further below are two fundamental matters that arose from the data and that underpin important aspects of this study's results.

The "Art of Management"

Successful approaches to innovative practice, according to the principal participants, were pragmatic and practical, and strongly encompassed "the art of the possible." The word "art" is apposite here because a definition of art useful within the context of this study is: "skill, especially human skill as opposed to nature; a thing in which skill may be exercised; demanding of mind and imagination" (Johnston, 1976, p. 36). The importance of leadership as "art" comes from statements by PT (and indirectly from the perceptions of most other participants). It could be defined from the ideas

presented as innovative, clever, resource-wise, deeply knowledgeable, courageous, emotionally intelligent, effective, and respected leadership that is more than the sum of its parts. Leadership "art" must not just be encouraged and allowed to flourish. To be most effective, it needed to be immersed in systems designed to make the possible become reality. It needed determined, operationally realistic systems that were clearly focused on increasing principal and school effectiveness. The importance of context as an underpinning influence (what's possible in one school may be impossible in another) needed to be imbedded in those systems.

A re-current theme in the data was that for principals, the complexity of their work was increasing. Begley and Johansson (2003) said that "value conflicts now seem to have become a defining characteristic of the school leadership role" (p. 16). They pointed to the broad range of potential value conflicts that school leaders must negotiate including organisational and personal/professional values. A combination of risk avoidance, poorly thought out subsidiarity, and disparate purposes across different parts and people of the DEC, according to participants, has led to a feeling of incoherence that has been met by principals with determination and courage, overt localism, and covert isolation of their schools from the "problems" generated by the system.

Participant Views of Positive Drivers and Impediments

Some of the impediments identified in this study parallel the "wrong drivers" that Fullan has identified, matters such as narrow accountability thinking and fragmented approaches to change. Such matters apparently reduced decision-making confidence and weighed heavily on maintaining motivation among the participants. Unfortunately, participants indicated that few of Fullan's "right drivers" were being adequately or appropriately applied. These matters included building leadership

capacity, the development of a holistic, locally respectful change mindset, and programs that encouraged intrinsic motivation and teamwork as well as "allness." Fullan (2011) said, "The mindset that works for whole system reform is the one that inevitably generates individual and collective motivation and corresponding skills to transform the system" (p. 5).

My participants implied in their statements that Fullan was generally on the right track with his view that systems needed to pursue the right drivers and be sparing with use of the wrong drivers. While appreciative of Fullan's analysis (Fullan, 2011) and his views on the best pathways to system reform, participants said that there were many dimensions, many disparate factors that were impinging on their ability to succeed, reform and innovate. At the school operational level, they claimed that obtaining change was an extremely complex task, the forces affecting it highly interdependent and contextual and it required quality leadership.

The constraining effects of a "one-size-fits-all" mentality and the effectiveness reducing (according to most participants) "us-and-them" syndrome loomed large in participant concerns, as did their view that an individual leader's capacity, experience and skill mattered greatly for achieving successful innovation, but that that seemed to be poorly recognised by the system. Efforts to build that capacity were not supported by system ethos or policy.

In the next chapter, a diagrammatic representation provides a pictorial approach to the balance between, and the influences of, positive drivers and impediments that have arisen in the data as these matters relate to participating principals' effectiveness.

Conclusion

This research has engaged with eight secondary principals about their perceptions of the drivers and impediments that have impacted their capacity to lead reform and innovation within their schools. It placed particular emphasis on the place of SBM. Seven participants questioned the efficacy of SBM in light of the system's responses to its implementation, and all participants, indicted that there was a lack of coherence across the DEC.

In a great many ways, the participants have pointed to the pressures and complexities that they must effectively manage within their constantly changing professional worlds. A key assumption of this research, was that the principal was the right person to focus on for a study that was seeking answers to an inquiry about school-based innovation and (inter alia) its relationship to SBM. While this study was necessarily limited in scope, the participants' statements leave little doubt that a school leader's capacity, determination, courage, and experience can impact the success of their staff and students. A consistent message was that their impact as a school leader was diminished partly due to uncertain authority, unhelpful external interventions, and their need to manage in a complex, constantly changing environment. Their effectiveness was mediated by a plethora of positive and negative forces, people, and influences. A significant complication was that trust was in short supply. Bryk and Schneider (2003) posited that "as individuals interact with one another around the work of schooling, they are constantly discerning the intentions embedded in the actions of others" (p. 41). Such "discernment" was evident during at least one of the interviews for all the participants.

A unanimous view of participants was that authority to make effective local decisions was uncertain in the face of the system's "one-size-fits-all" ethos. This

centralist system mindset too often ignored and disrespected their leadership skills, the

context of their schools, and the wishes of the communities in which they worked. As

Fullan and others have consistently pointed out, genuine change that could impact all

aspects of an education system, including of course its individual schools, was very

much about changing the culture of the whole (Fullan, 2000a, 2001, 2003, 2011; Fullan

& Quinn, 2016; Hargreaves, 2005b; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley,

2009). All participants indicated at various stages of their three interviews, albeit with

different emphases and using different examples, that the real problem for them

revolved around a system culture unsuited to local change and innovation.

The following chapter provides a thorough analysis of the data gathered in all

three phases and relates the study's outcomes to relevant literature.

Chapter 7

Analysis

School principals who choose to lead rather than just manage must first understand the school's culture…. When an organization has a clear understanding of its purpose, why it exists, what it must do and who it should serve, the culture will ensure that things work well.

MacNeil et al. (2009, p. 74)

Introduction

This chapter summarises the key evidentiary points from the interviews and provides deeper analysis and clarification of the four major themes introduced in Chapter 5 and further developed through the gateway approach in Chapter 6. The first part of Chapter 7 provides a diagrammatic summary of the key aspects of change that participating principals indicated in their interviews could impact as drivers or impediments on their capacity to lead effectively and be innovative in their schools. The diagram indicates convergence of participant views in respect of the matters tabled and

while all the participants were experienced principals, they were working in disparate contexts.

The chapter then provides deeper analysis of the research questions, linking the findings to relevant literature. This analysis of the research outcomes is directed by a section that sets out the key findings as desiderata. The chapter concludes with a brief exploration of the thinking behind this research effort, the research mentality.

At times this thesis contains references that might be considered to equate participants' perceptions with empirical research findings. I make it clear that I understand that perceptions are about *beliefs*. The participants' beliefs may or may not be empirically supported but that is not to say that there is no value in exploring, where appropriate, the evidence in the literature that accords with the research findings.

Positive and Negative Drivers and Effectiveness

Figure 5 provides a diagrammatic representation of the key aspects of change reported by the participating principals and their likely impact as drivers or impediments for innovative practice in schools. The horizontal bars represent 12 separate but related aspects of principals' work reported in the interviews—points further to the left represent more strongly perceived impediments or negative drivers; points at the center of the bar more neutral positions; and, points further to the right more strongly perceived positive drivers. The diamond on each bar is intended as a summary or general position in terms of the principals' views. The smaller, darker bar shows the range of views expressed—signifying if the views were clustered or dispersed, or skewed one way or the other on a particular dimension.

Before considering Figure 5, it is important to note two caveats underpinning its use and interpretation. Firstly, this is not intended as a statistically defensible model but a device for qualitative reflection and summarisation of the case study principals' perceptions. Rather than formal scientific generalisations, these represent what Myers (2000) identified as "partially intuitive, naturalistic generalisations that arise through recognising similarities" (p. 7), such as those that exist in the current case studies. I asked the principals a series of common and more specific individualised questions, then qualitatively analysed the transcripts, and through this process came to a general understanding of the principals' views as presented in Figure 5. Secondly, to ensure confidentiality, no specific data points were ascribed to particular principals and thus no judgements can be inferred about individual principal's attitudes. The judgements made were those of the researcher based on the interviews and analysis of the transcripts. These judgements were referenced against my supervisors' views but no specific member checking took place around these models.

Impacts on the Key Dimensions

At one extreme, participants strongly pointed to the value of data and evidence to help them focus on the crucial matter of teaching and learning; at the other, over-regulation, a lack of trust, excessive compliance, and other externally set requirements were identified as factors reducing a principal's real-world effectiveness. The more positive drivers involved the use of evidence to assist an informed focus on improving teaching and learning: local efforts to develop a positive, contextually appropriate, academically successful school culture; and, the importance of self-belief, of personal drive, and educational understanding built on experience and even perhaps, a degree of courage.
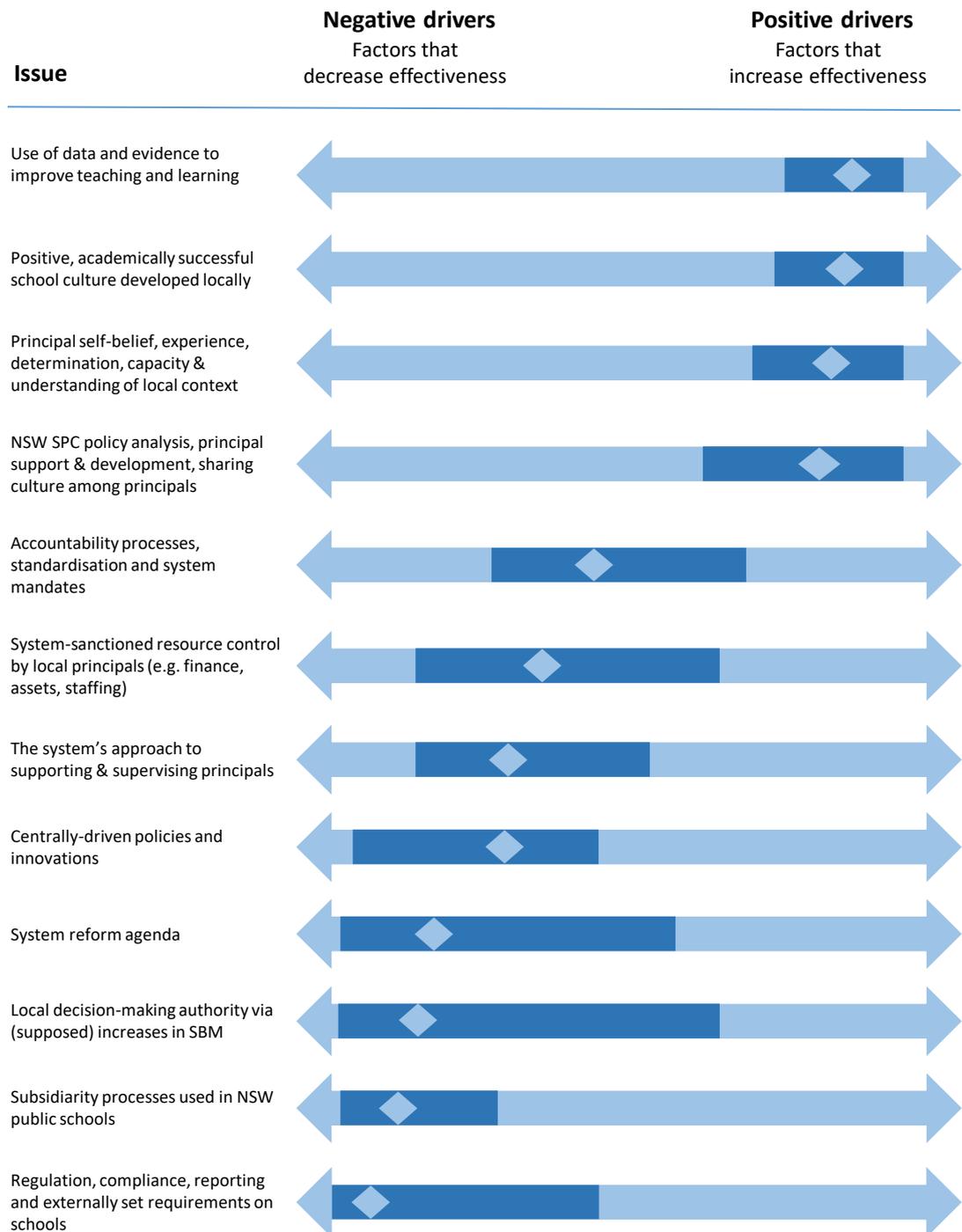
Figure 5. Positive and negative impacts on key dimensions of school reform and principal effectiveness.

There was variation on resource control matters with particular recourse to the newly introduced finance control systems that were seen as poorly designed and complex to understand and use. A range of views also applied to the factors of system

support and supervision. All participants were unimpressed with the system's approach to policy formation, the volume of change they had to manage as a result of new policies and, what they perceived as poorly conceived (in terms of school implementation), mandated system and government initiatives. Individual participant views on the efficacy of SBM at their school ranged from moderately positive to scathingly negative and more generally, participant attitudes towards the system's reform agenda were skewed towards the negative. Indeed, the case study principals held generally negative views about system reforms, subsidiarity settings, and the system's regulatory framework although two participants saw some value in appropriate levels of regulation and locally focussed externally set requirements, but they did not agree with the processes being used.

What were the Key Messages?

The material below provides a succinct summary and desiderata from the issues raised by participating principals. This information provides a prelude to the deeper analysis that follows.

Over time, a sophisticated, research-informed, re-working of many fundamental notions that underpin the NSW system's approaches to school and principal effectiveness might be required. Such action would involve significant (and according to the participants) necessary cultural change. This study's data would suggest that the ability for school leaders to be innovative at school level rested on a complex layering of contextual circumstances, on the interactions between system and school leaders, and on the leader's skill and determination to improve instruction in spite of the range of impediments that this study's participants believed were affecting opportunities for success. Participants indicated that these circumstances and interactions could be

enhanced if nested in a more supportive, school site focused system and within positive school cultures. Building suitable cultures at school level places a burden on principals that requires determination, clarity of purpose, and experience. Effective principals used a range of techniques to allow them to successfully navigate their schools through a labyrinth of impediments; these techniques were developed from experience and participants suggested that a reframing of the approaches to principal preparation was required.

Impediments were perceived to be increasingly dominant in terms of their number, complexity, and negative impact. All eight participants took the view that compliance must not become the focus of their work efforts. Day-to-day operational requirements were taxing enough but when innovation work was added to workloads, there was little time or energy available for compliance and "irrelevant" policy requirements. Participants indicted that many of the people working externally to schools were unaware that all forms of intervention had the potential to distract from achieving local goals; that there was a cost to regulation. This matter was exacerbated because government and system reform approaches too often included ill-conceived implementation processes that rarely allowed for context. Increases in local decision-making authority had triggered a maladaptive system-level response that increased the number of compliance and control measures imposed on principals. One participant provided a strong minority view that misogyny in government and senior officer ranks was pervasive in driving system recentralisation and excessive compliance.

SBM had "possibilities" but in itself was not a driver of significant importance for innovative practice and in reality, principals did not have a great deal of management flexibility available. The system's SBM rhetoric, its LSLD policy and local leadership and management realities simply did not tally. Authority permissions

were unclear and trust was in short supply because of ill-conceived subsidiarity settings. System coherence and holistic approaches to change were lacking. Perhaps extraordinarily, participants indicated that a significant part of their time was spent pushing back against a system-imposed "ceiling" on their effectiveness. The irony of that same system demanding that their students perform was not lost on them. They found themselves "marooned in the middle" beset by, but also engaged in, an ethos of "us and them."

The system's attitudinal and structural positions were unsuitable if the goal was to engender innovation in schools. Sustainable and practical solutions to, as one participant put it, "this mess," according to participants, lay in reducing reform volume, in overcoming incoherence and excessive risk aversion, in clarifying the organisation's direction, in refocussing the work effort for many system (school external) employees, in reframing policy development with special attention to implementation processes, and in rethinking the place and importance of school leaders.

Analysis Relating Relevant Literature
to the Research Outcomes

External Intervention

My case study principals saw themselves as managing in difficult times trying to reconcile local needs with dynamic sets of external (and internal) forces. This affected their capacity for innovation. They considered the system's current SBM policies as "handcuffed" by repeated bureaucratic and political interventions and an excessive number of reform policies.

In their examination of two decades of Austrian school autonomy reforms, Altrichter et al. (2014) referred to a "new unclarity" arising for school leaders. Their

multiple case study approach parallels my study of NSW secondary principals. The Austrian decentralisation policies had, according to Altrichter et al., developed a form of autonomy that became about optimising "school governance without thoroughly changing the existing types of coordination" (p. 682). A complicating factor for Austrian schools was that their purportedly increased autonomy sat alongside policies advocating market-based and client choice forces.

In the NSW context, participants put forward the view that a school's context and financial position could affect the potential efficacy of SBM. PW specifically said that SBM efficacy was subject to the socio-educational level of a school and its ability to fund any innovative programs. That is, it was more difficult for schools like PW's to compete in a market-based environment. Another way to put this is that if all of a system's schools had a given level of SBM authority, schools from "poorer" circumstances were less likely to extract maximum gain from local flexibility. This was because of the complexity that market-based policies generated for disadvantaged schools. PW said that her students' needs were more complex, more demanding of constant action than many other schools, yet human and financial resource availability was determined in practice by matters like enrolment size.

Matters discussed in previous chapters of this study also appeared as issues in the Austrian research including: excessive and poorly targeted accountability testing; diversification of schools; imposition of arbitrary performance standards; and, resource allocations being dependent on performance and enrolment numbers.

My case study principals clearly pointed to the need for school leaders to manage in light of their particular circumstances. They considered that system-prescribed policy drivers worked irregularly (if at all) and often became impediments in school-level operational settings. They had clear, detailed perceptions about the

mechanisms controlling system and school operations and knew what they did and did not agree with. They felt frustrated that they were powerless to significantly influence the prevailing system control ethos or the processes being used to drive reforms (notwithstanding SPC efforts regarding these matters). They were concerned that regressive system-level processes at times reduced rather than enhanced their chances of local success.

Altrichter et al. (2014) also discussed the implementation difficulties of significant policy reform and pointed out that many reforms had a structural nature. Where this was poorly understood, problems developed. Altrichter et al. commented that "structural provisions are neither complete nor fully adapted to contexts where operative use is to take place" (p. 692). This statement captures many of my participants' concerns including the pervasive view that context and practical operations at the school level seemed poorly understood by system leaders. More broadly, because the system and many senior officers did not fully understand the complexities of reform at the school level, the principals found themselves overwhelmed by excessive demands, expending significant time and energy "managing upward," leaving less time and energy for school-based innovation. As Giles and Hargreaves (2006) put it, "innovative schools therefore seem especially imperilled by standardized reform movements" (p. 126).

The overall implications of the Altrichter et al. (2014) case study was that enacting SBM is unlikely to be a straightforward process. Implementation was contextual and there would be crucial matters of system and school operations that simply did not feature in any rollout of system-level reforms. According to my study's participants, the system's operational understanding of SBM and school-based innovation comes across as largely vacuous, leaving the strong impression, as PS put it,

that "the Emperor's got no clothes." Fullan (2000b) pointed to the reasons why SBM often failed: "because SBM is an amorphous umbrella concept which is treated as an end in itself" (p. 455). According to my participating principals, it was crucial that reform efforts were flexible and responsive to local context. The participating principals were of a single mind that "one size does not fit all."

Bates (2013) undertook detailed case studies of two UK state primary schools concluding that "a significant flaw of systems thinking is the level of simplification at which policy makers operate on abstract categories such as standards, as if they were reality" (p. 38). She added that "the systemic approach adopted by policy-makers may be contributing to an erosion of educational quality and placing potentially damaging expectations on children" (p. 38). Bates' study cited accountability standards as an example but the current study's participants saw a much wider range of what I would term "low reality" policy development—policy that could have negative implications for innovation and student outcomes. My case study principals were in accord, indicating that they saw a significant part of their job as locally managing the realities while at the same time "managing" the system's thinking, policies, and people.

It should be acknowledged that the matter of a "one size fits all" perspective is not tempered in this thesis by a deeper examination of what may be an individual principal issue of problems in using, or perhaps at least in accommodating, broad system policy requirements to their school's particular situations. Nevertheless, I would argue that to do so would extend the work outside the basic parameters of the study as set out in the research questions and the methodology. It was a study based on activity theory and perceptions (beliefs). There was a major and potentially damaging disconnection between what these experienced school principals perceived they needed to do and what they were required to do. This translated into increased workloads and

wasted effort. As Caldwell (2004) said, "innovation must be balanced by abandonment" (p. 81). There were numerous accounts in the current study's transcripts indicating that the case study schools were sometimes forced to abandon their own fledgling and even well-established innovations in favour of system mandates that simply did not fit with the school's specific context, needs, or history of reform.

In terms of the reform load, the participating principals were clear that while they rationalised demands at school level, the system and its leaders were consistently pushing for more and different reforms. The amount and pace of mandated reform was accelerating in the view of the participating principals. This in effect reduced the time, energy, and resources to address local needs. The principals' consequent frustrations, moral dilemmas, and operational ambiguities were evident throughout the transcripts.

Eacott (2011) pointed to the ubiquitous nature of what he poignantly described as "political intervention in schooling through the cultural re-engineering of school leadership and the embedding of performativity in the leaders' soul" (p. 47). The principals in Eacott's study often found themselves in a situation where "the principal becomes little more than the local face of the systemic agenda" (p. 52). PT referred to this phenomenon as "school-delivered management."

If principals fear they are nothing more than the face of system reform, it is not surprising to hear them describe the current organisational climate as "controlling," "unresponsive," and a "source of frustration" in their working lives. Two participants saw a risk of disassociation of the school's leader from their crucial role. PZ indicated she knew of several colleagues who had "walked away" from the job because "it was just too hard."

The data also indicated participants' frustration with what many of them saw as the system's incompetence and disdainful "one-size-fits-all" thinking that led to principals "talking down" elements of their own system. Principals find themselves trapped in situations where they are either forced to subtly (and in some cases directly) undermining centralist policies, ignoring those external to their school whom they perceived to be unhelpful or intrusive.

A raft of reforms have been mandated by most Western governments in relatively short time spans (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Codd, 2005), resulting in many teachers suffering change fatigue and burnout (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Vanroelen, 2014). These authors pointed to the fact that many teachers (some of whom became principals) started their careers with strong personal freedom and little external supervision or testing. As a result, they "reacted" negatively to the fast pace of change and excessive imposed accountabilities.

Flawed Accountability

Plank and Condliffe (2013) explored how teaching and learning was influenced by the "high stakes" testing agenda impacting American schools in a study of 23 varied classrooms. They summarised their findings as follows:

> It is therefore important to design accountability policies that are explicitly intended to improve classroom quality. One way to do this might be to hold schools and teachers accountable for more than just test scores and to broaden our metrics of school quality to include the quality of the classroom environment. (p. 1177)

They also posited that accountability processes *need not* lead to teacher difficulties and the current study's participants would agree. My participating principals

gave no indication that they were against sound accountability practices per se. However, they did express concerns about the current NSW accountability processes and how the current reporting regimes could generate significant distortions in their efforts to lift *all* their students' outcomes. An important problem they identified was that the focus of the accountability was often too narrow and did not respect school context.

Barber (2004) took the view that accountability was vitally important if improvement was to be attained in school results and that accountability systems needed to be thorough and "correctly designed" and based on quality, quantitative data. Barber and Mourshed (2007) took a cumulative perspective of the path to success for both systems and schools revolving around instructional practice constantly improving and ultimately reaching an exemplary level system-wide. Barber (2004) emphasised that instructional gains could only be obtained through accountability approaches that were rigorous but he accepted that rigorous accountability could generate short-term damage and potentially generate damaging pressures for teachers and schools. He noted that if schools don't know how to improve, then excessive pressure would not help. However, this view risks ignoring the complex, often contextually nested ways that both school and system leaders respond and interact in the light of policy shifts and government initiatives.

Elmore (2003) claimed that while cheap and relatively easy to implement, many system-level accountability regimes did little to build schools' capacities for improvement. Accountability tightening was likely to be a part of new policies and initiatives (Codd, 2005) but it was by no means the only factor a system might use to try to positively influence outcomes as highlighted by the evidence in this study.

Moos et al. (2011) undertook a detailed research project that concerned measures of successful schooling, and in their findings they said:

> There is a tendency in Australia and the UK that many principals find that the national standards are not good enough indicators for a good or a successful school. They agree with principals in the looser accountability countries (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) that schools' core purpose is broader than basic skills. (p. 220)

My principal participants took the view that a broader, more inclusive approach to accountability processes in NSW was desirable but said that this was not happening. In their research, Moos et al. (2011) also discussed what they called "the hurricane of accountabilities." They noted that the expectations of principals, teachers, and communities in respect of the use of externally generated outcomes data was changing. This "accountability hurricane" generally emphasised detailed standards for student achievements and this "has been shown to have an impact on the ways schools are managed and led" (p. 220).

While poorly thought out accountability and its potentially negative effects on a school's teachers and students was one of the issues raised by my case study principals, they also reported that obtaining a quality classroom environment required some measures of accountability and sustained local intervention including local management of system-imposed requirements. The risk they saw was that system requirements if not "filtered" might distract from a focus on teaching and learning.

In their study, Plank and Condliffe (2013) pointed to the problem of decoupling of system-level accountability from student performance; that is, decoupling it from what actually happens in classrooms. My case study principals believed that their role included designing the optimum amount of information about system demands

(including accountability) that they would allow to "flow through" to their teachers. Such local action allowed for context and allowed for the strengths and vagaries of their particular workforce. This was necessary to ensure teacher emotional stability, project reasonable workload expectations, and ultimately, to gain the best possible results in situ, they said. Perhaps this could be described as "purposeful gate keeping."

As the current study's interviews progressed, the participants' perceptions became ever clearer about how they interacted with those people and bodies external to them. The overall professional environment that was reported was one of system control, compliance, and narrow accountability, not one of cooperation, mutual purpose, and agreed goals. In a qualitative study targeting medical professionals working in the Alberta Health Services, Mansouri and Rowney (2014) discussed matters that might illuminate principal perceptions about their problems with accountability offered in the current study. They indicated that "with respect to professionals, the first step is to determine what accountability means to them, how accountability is defined, assessed, and enforced in professional settings." (p. 46).

The results of this study and the wider literature show that highly control-oriented environments and monitory control approaches provide a weak environment for professional accountability to public priorities. Further, this study's participants saw accountability as part of their responsibility, part of a useful set of approaches that could help improve key aspects of their schools. However, they said accountability was too driven by system agendas. What was missing, was scope for meaning from a principal's point of view, scope for local needs to be incorporated into accountability application. In short they held a view that all that could be expected from the system's approaches, was compliance.

The participants indicated that a problem with "one-size-fits-all" accountability was that it drew its authority from system gathered data. Creswell (2008) said that the processes chosen and the emphases made in gathering and analysing data could vary what it indicated yet the processes used to underpin the NSW accountability approaches were often put forward by the system as having been achieved on an incontrovertible, unchallengeable basis. Farrelly (2017) saw this basis as problematic:

> Clearly, the way you crunch the figures shapes the story they tell. But that's a normal statistical hazard. There are other, more significant reasons the attempt to "scientise" education ranking is a dangerous furphy. For one thing, school-ranking cannot be scientific because there is no control for the experiment. Kids vary. (Farrelly, 2017, p. 30)

The current study's interview data gave no indication that participants were against a structured system of public education, nor the use of detailed data of any kind (to help drive improvement) or appropriate supervisory structures. Six participating principals indicated that they were (gladly) part of NSW' large public education system. They acknowledged that this meant that there would be compliance reporting, accountability requirements and that system-level policies would need to be followed. The problem for them was that impediments lay in the extent and detail of the system's policy and accountability requirements, in its ethos of control, in its constant political manoeuvring, and in its lack of capacity to embrace school contextual issues. The participants claimed that contextual issues affected not only a school's daily functioning, but also, the longer term strategic aspects of its operations because the majority of public secondary schools were nested within their local communities. Those communities included not just the parent body but local businesses, local politicians and service organisations, inter alia. The local high school was often an important part of

community strategic concerns. To this must be added the impact on attitudes towards education that particular socio-economic situations provided. The "management" of context to deliver maximum outcomes for a school was consequently a very complex task, a task that was in turn influenced by system policy, ethos and resource allocations and this complex task should be reflected in the design of accountability processes.

"Us and Them"

Throughout the data, there was a quintessential underlying view that NSW education was beset by an ethos of "us and them". The "them," many of whom were DoE employees working external to their schools, were often discussed in derisive and toxic ways, indicating strongly held negative views about those in positions of authority and support roles. The "us" were the participants and their principal colleagues. There were strong indicators of a "principal team" approach within my case study principals' networks. Participating principals all said that they greatly valued their principal colleagues, greatly valued helping each other. Two of my participants went as far as saying that they were at times prepared to put their own school's needs second to the needs of a colleague's school, even to the extent of sharing scarce resources if absolutely required. Equity concerns clearly mattered to my participants who all indicated that they gave freely of their time, energy, and expertise when it came to sharing strategies and supporting principal colleagues. The question that should be asked is why such largess did not generally extend to the system's support units and personnel. Five of the participating principals were openly critical of their employer's current directions, policy settings, and support structures. One reason given was that system and government decisions had accelerated their ever increasing workload and,

importantly, they did not see instructional or student performance gains associated with this workload increase.

Isherwood (1973) reported on the views of Blau and Scott (1962) who had developed research-based concepts about authority concerning subordinate groups: "When a superior's subordinate group develops norms of allegiance, respect and support for their leader, he will have considerable (informal) authority over them" (Blau & Scott, as cited in Isherwood, 1973, p. 293). Blau and Scott believed that a superior's authority was more a function of the personal qualities and the personal interactions of that superior with his subordinates than of any organisational arrangements.

All my principal participants, either directly or indirectly, went to the matter of trust or rather, the lack of it. Nevertheless, two participants were complementary about their supervisors and among all participants, there seemed no particular animosity about the actual person who was their senior officer. That was not to say that they universally thought them to be particularly competent or understanding of *their* school's uniqueness and complexity. I drew an inference that the ethos of "us and them" which my participants described, had at least partially developed as a consequence of system and government policies that they opposed. Their supervisors had to ensure that system policy was being followed. The system's narrow policies, inflexible methods, and narrow-mindedness came to the fore rather than specific individuals. One participant suggested that her supervisor was little more than a "pawn of policy," experiencing drivers from above and below just as she was. She made it clear though that this comment was not intended to be a slight on that person's professionalism.

Generally, my case study principals took the view that principals simply had to manipulate and manage all the impeding system matters and navigate through or around the unsupportive people in their professional environment so that they could "get on

with" the "real" work (those tasks associated with leading and managing their own schools).

Their universal support of the SPC arose because this group strongly represented the "us." In their minds, the SPC served as a vital "buffer" against system excesses. Its existence allowed for influence in respect of system and government policies to emanate from a professional body thus not exposing individuals to possible censure for their views. The evidence was clear that the SPC was the "team" that mattered to my participants. Extensive experience had taught them not to trust a great many of the people with whom they had worked (the notable exception being their principal colleagues). At least some of this lack of trust related to their perception of a prevailing ethos of risk aversion in the system. The principals' perceptions were that *they* would be held solely accountable for any problems that might develop from decisions they had made. You are "on your own," said PT, and this concept underscored many of the interview discussions across all participants. They believed that bureaucratic intervention was frequently insufficiently nuanced and not in the best interests of their students. It often appeared to the principals to be primarily about protecting certain senior individuals, the broader system or even the government. One strategy the majority of my case study principals used to overcome this was to (selectively) disassociate themselves from the system and its support units, more often covertly than overtly. They were clear that this was just one more difficult, energy-consuming but necessary task for them. Whatever discomfort or abrasion this caused was seen as worthwhile because it allowed them to move forward with their local matters, to pursue their local plans. Notwithstanding this, making decisions outside the system's policy framework was a matter requiring thought and courage.

Many of the participating principals' statements about the system and the people external to their schools entered into discussion that must be considered as political. Sniderman and Theriault (2004) discussed matters relating to opposing views among groups of people as almost always being about political discourse. They believed that opposing values and the way arguments were framed played a major role in people's interpretation and acceptance of what others thought. This study's participants were sceptical of the reasons for many of the reforms and compliance requirements that they were being subjected to by the system and this was at least one of the underlying reasons for them eschewing some of the personnel or, perhaps more importantly, what they stood for. Sniderman and Theriault (2004) reflected on this issue as follows:

> Consider then the problem of framing from a political perspective. In real politics, opposing sides contest issues, and part of that contest is competing to frame issues, to define their meaning, to establish how they should be thought about. (p. 145)

There was no evidence in the data that the participating principals were trying to reframe their roles or become politically active. The SPC was the organisation that "competed" to define how issues should be thought about in education, a role that no individual principal was able to succeed in. However the evidence was clear that my participating principals had developed their ideas and were standing by them, albeit with flexibility and pragmatism, understanding that they were part of a large, bureaucratic system. Nevertheless, to varying degrees, all the participants thought that system's directions were at times inappropriate, and at times regressive, in terms of obtaining the level and type of school reform and innovation they were seeking and believed essential.

Reform Difficulties

Sahlberg (2007) noted that the gains over time in the well-respected Finnish education system were based on "equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust" (p. 147). Importantly for the current study, Sahlberg reported that Finnish principals (and teachers) were highly respected members of their society and that their contribution to the country's current and future needs was highly valued. My case study participants would envy this type of respect but did not see it to a significant degree in their work. Their uniformly adopted solution was to try to locally establish a regime of flexibility, teacher professionalism, and trust (within their school and between principal colleagues at least), combined with skilful resource acquisition. At the same time they worked with their local communities to obtain support and understanding for their innovative practices and the needs and distinctiveness of their student cohort. This localised "in spite of the system" approach was seen as where SBM could really make a difference for their schools irrespective of the system's controlling responses. How well SBM can enable better innovative practice and better local outcomes, given the impediments that have been described by participants, becomes a critically moot point.

Pont, Nusche, and Hopkins (2008) pointed to the many positive approaches that school systems could undertake to support the leadership of principals. Indeed, this influential OECD report claimed that system support for developing strong principal leadership was one of the vital components of positive, sustainable school improvement: "system leadership can build capacity in education; share expertise, facilities and resources; encourage innovation and creativity; improve leadership and spread it more widely; and provide skills support" (p. 3). However, the perceptions of my case study principals indicated that this aspect of system leadership, while perhaps being present in some forms, was not the norm for the NSW system.

McNeil (2002) discussed a number of business-inspired managerially based reforms aimed at improving the Texas public education system. According to McNeil, these reforms were essentially unsuccessful and generated a great deal of controversy and upset throughout the teaching profession in that state. In speaking about the problems generated she said, "[T]hey provide a powerful warning about the effect on teaching and learning when all the authority over all the significant decisions about teaching and learning is centralised and all the means are standardised" (p. 154). The data in this study suggest that this advice is not being heeded by the NSW system.

One part of the Texas reforms that was particularly abhorrent to teachers and administrators (while at the same time achieving very little according to McNeil) was the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers (TECAT) program. McNeil posited that this reform was about political and bureaucratic control, not about performance improvements in the schools. It was a reform designed to provide both quality control and confidence in the state's public education system, inter alia, establishing that all school staff were literate. While no state-sponsored reform focussed on teacher literacy was discussed by my participants (although both the federal and NSW state governments currently support such), the issues of political control through bureaucratic means were strongly evident in the data.

A good example is the policy announcement by the NSW Education Minister (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2016) that all students had to obtain a particular level of success in Year 9 NAPLAN testing before they could become eligible for a Higher School Certificate. The President of BOSTES (now NESA) wrote to NSW principals in November 2016 explaining that, from 2020, students had to demonstrate minimum standards of literacy and numeracy to receive an HSC (Alegounarias, 2016). The standard specified was potentially even more impactful than the TECAT introduced

in Texas. The NSW standards were interpreted as an externally imposed mechanism to hold principals, teachers, and schools accountable for each student's longer term certification (and potentially tertiary entrance as well). The participants' concern regarding this announcement, was that socio-economic circumstances, specific contexts, and achievement standards differ immensely between schools. For example, the 2016 NAPLAN National Report showed that only 51.8% of NSW students would have met the prescribed standard in reading, including only 19% of Indigenous students.

In another accountability initiative called "Bump It Up" (NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2017–2020) released in 2015, the NSW Education Minister wrote: "the NSW Premier has set a challenging target: to increase the proportion of NSW students in the top two NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy by 8 per cent by 2019" (NSW Department of Education, 2015, p. 2). To ensure the new standards were met, Public Schools Directors were required to intervene in poorly performing schools based on system-acquired data and, where necessary, to devise plans to lift literacy and numeracy outcomes. These actions were to take immediate precedence over that school's previous planning. While they were not personally affected, the approach of over-riding individual school needs and plans by any external initiative greatly upset two of the participating principals. The case study principals saw this as a clear example of devaluing school-level planning and the commission of a principal to lead their school. They believed it demonstrated DoE disrespect for local needs, complexity, and context.

PW said that these types of state-determined reform solutions were damaging to schools, teachers, and students and frustrating to principals. Re-adjusting local plans because of system interventions was just one more matter to be managed by principals. The combination of internal plans and external ad hoc requirements generated a

complex tableau where determined effort to reconcile the professional drivers thus created did not always reap hoped for results, regardless of how hard or how cleverly a principal worked for improvement. She noted that the world inside the school gates was not as simple as that implied by the Premier's and Minister's initiatives. Local management reality required that the minutiae of leading a school could not be ignored. Principals were not in a position to ignore local complexity, local personalities, local planning, or local needs.

In the Texas example, McNeil (2002) described the state's message to the public as basically being that the schools were "out of control." The political response to "out of control" schools was to establish control at a level above the classroom, above the school, above the principal.

> These Texas school reforms demonstrate how the embedding of controls can occur while the constituents of public schools are focusing on momentary distractors tangential to the larger issues. These reforms also point to the complicated relationships between the economic goals of school reforms and the tendency to solve educational problems by adding management controls and undermining teacher authority. One purpose of bureaucratic controls is to gain control over uncertain environments. (pp. 169–170)

This thesis' data offers qualitative case study evidence that the NSW system is attempting to control the uncertain environment that its own SBM policies and fallible financial control systems may have helped to develop. The NSW system, according to my participating principals, saw an uncertain environment and an intransigent approach to change within the profession; as a consequence, it applied bureaucratic fixes. The participants saw a need to have genuine local control (SBM) to improve their school's situation (and their students' outcomes) as being "handcuffed" (PT) by the system. In

general, they responded negatively to the system's "reform" approaches. They implied that there was a discrepancy between the educational "world view" of the system and its personnel and principalship. There was no harmony of purpose in DEC.

Possible Solutions

The participants offered positive solutions in keeping with their perceptions of how reform and innovation could be obtained. They said that sustainable and practical solutions lay in reducing the rate and amount of reform in NSW; in reducing incoherence and excessive risk aversion; in clarifying the organisation's overall directions (this would require agreement throughout the organisation on what really mattered); in reframing and refocussing policy development and implementation processes; and, in rethinking the range and types of positions that are external to schools while at the same time, reviewing the qualities and qualifications of the people in the external positions. Such positive solutions though are very complex, potentially political, they overlap and would be difficult to achieve. It would be a many faceted reform effort that would require multiple simultaneous system, government, and school actions. It would require reframing principal authority and the power of individual educators.

As Green and Etheridge (1999) and Fullan and Quinn (2016) discussed, albeit a decade and a half apart, changing some parts of a system won't improve the whole. If the "us-and-them" mentality is more widely spread among the NSW principalship than just from the perspective of my participants, obtaining whole-system, simultaneous reform across myriad fronts will be unlikely to succeed.

Use of Data and Evidence

The principals participating in this study said, in a variety of ways, with a variety of examples, that it was classroom change that really made the biggest difference to student outcomes. Plank and Condliffe (2013) said, "[T]o understand mechanisms driving positive and negative effects on student learning, it is necessary to look beyond achievement data and step inside classrooms" (p. 1152). Roberson (2014) pointed to what in much of the literature has become a truism that "the work of schools is teaching and learning" (p. 340), and Urick and Bowers (2011) said that there was "a direct relationship between principal leadership and academic climate" (p. 330). They related the success (or otherwise) of this direct relationship to a principal's personal perceptions about their school's academic performance and climate, indicating that a principal's perceptions about their own position and their relationship with external parts of their organisation in turn affected the climate of their schools.

My case study principals said that their approach to maximise their school's climate (and culture) was to try to shield themselves and their staff from some aspects of system authority and policy. They had devised their particular versions of a "porous firewall" that they could control and adjust as needed. Each version of the firewall was unique because each school, each staff, each community, each principal in the study, was different. This applied because a school's unique context had to interact with a dynamic external educational environment that was controlled by politicians, unions, and the system.

Lord and Maher (2002) discussed the importance of the links between leadership approaches, perceptions, actual performance, and leadership success, positing that the interaction of these factors was a phenomenon that had significant impact on behaviour in organisations. This thesis' data clearly pointed to a relationship between principal

perceptions about leadership and how they led their schools within the complex system that they were part of. Of even more interest was the high degree of commonality among my participants about the dimensions of that relationship. One important example given by one of the participating principals was that while it was all very well to decide on innovations from the principal's chair, the perceptions of others (both internal and external) constrained what could and could not be achieved. The participants also pointed to the importance of data in context in determining just what was needed locally at any given time.

There was a view in the literature that the importance or otherwise of evidence for change is strongly affected by the person acquiring that evidence. This was borne out in the perceptions offered in this study.

Kuhn (2000) discussed and summarised studies about the performance of adults in terms of knowledge acquisition strategies, stating that:

> Such studies point to the critical role of metacognitive and metastrategic processes in regulating knowledge acquisition. They [adults] apply knowledge-acquisition and inference strategies in a selective way to protect their own, often erroneous, beliefs. (p. 110)

The participating principals were constantly seeking evidence to ensure their change directions were appropriate, wanting to confirm that their innovations were working as planned. In doing so they were undertaking evaluation processes but, according to Kuhn, this necessarily involved them in metacognitive and metastrategic development. My case study principals said (or implied) that they were interpreting evidence and data through the particular lens of their position, their experience, and their educational context.

In their extraordinarily busy, complex world it is understandable that they would be developing knowledge skills and not at all surprising that those skills when applied would impact what actual innovations were chosen (or continued, based on their reading of the evaluation). Another way to put this is that the data in this study implied that the choice of a particular innovation in a particular school (from what would likely have been a long list) was undertaken by a particular principal because of the way that person interpreted, accepted, or rejected information. Connor and Becker (2003) stated that "individuals' responses depend on how they organise experience and information about the context in which they are operating" (p. 158).

Acknowledging that principals interpret evidence and policy through a personal lens, it follows that their perceptions of "us-and-them" are, at least in part, a manifestation of their own school situations, perceptions and experiences. The participating principals were all, as PT described it, "on the boundary of change." They all saw great value in data and evidence and leading as a consequence of that information.

Operational Reality

The interview data also demonstrated the individuality and complexity of understanding of approaches to their specific situations.

An example of how ignoring operational realities can damage schools was given by Elmore (2003). In discussing a government-mandated system initiative that had been used in the United States (the mathematically based AYP, or annual yearly progress requirement), he noted that the approach was:

a completely arbitrary mathematical function grounded in no defensible

knowledge or theory of school improvement and could, and probably will, result

in penalising and closing schools that are experts in school improvement. (p. 7)

Elmore also pointed to the fact that all people working in schools are learners

and that learning, in his view, is not linear. Gains in performance are not made in equal

increments as time goes by. People need to try out new ideas and reject old ones, and

this is an important factor in why there is frustration in obtaining school-level

improvements and innovations. My case study principals so often referred to the

uniqueness of their contexts, of the professional and performance variations among their

staff (including their limited control of who those people were), and the need to gain

consensus and broad support across their learning community if an innovation was to

succeed.

Their collective view about the lack of contextual recognition of schools by the

system was that in designing, implementing, and evaluating innovation, it appeared that

it was being undertaken from almost opposing poles by the system and its schools. The

participating principals said that it required great skill to reconcile these opposing

forces. This was happening because of the poor understanding of the operational

realities of schools (and an ethos that relied excessively on external accountability) by

both the system and the government. In contrast, as principals, they believed consensus

and intrinsic motivation were the pathways for success. Darling-Hammond (2005) said:

One of the toughest nuts to crack in educational change is policy itself, not this

policy or that policy, but the basic ways in which policy is conceived, developed

and put into practice. (p. 362)

Leading Change through Disruptive Times

The participating principals in this study saw their work as a continuous process of struggle. Most participants believed that leading change was not a strength of the NSW system. They said that there was a lack of system understanding about how change worked or how to lead it, and that this could impact the capacity of a school's leader to design, implement, and maintain innovative practice at their school. They noted that school leaders did not work in isolation from society, government, unions, or their local communities and, as PZ commented, "building a culture suiting innovation, it's not an easy thing to do because you're not a rock with no effect on you from the sea. You're being washed all over the shop."

PW suggested that the society within which schools were embedded was in a state of significant flux and disruption of its norms. As a result, school principals were feeling the impact of a range of pressures that formed a phalanx of change that threatened to overwhelm rational, morally sustainable, evidence-based leadership approaches. Worse, proven local solutions to problems were too often underrated by senior officers or became too costly to continue, or were overtaken by system-led priorities.

Some of the forces disrupting school-level change were articulated by participants: high levels of accountability, rapid demographic change, teacher turnover and teacher quality issues, unrealistic community expectations, poor resourcing, and poor operational management systems. It was, they implied, a continuous process of struggle, of great personal learning and self-belief. Pepper, London, Dishman, and Lewis (2010) posited that "all of these individual, immediate pressures have attached to them a complex, underlying set of organisational, legal and political constraints that shape their manifestation" (p. 8).

PW's view about the effects of misogyny to justify increasingly controlling policies in NSW has at least generalised support in the literature and can be seen in the broader perspective:

> In both the media and academic accounts it would appear as though the blame for social and educational inequalities can now be laid at the door of women—particularly middle-class mothers. Through examining competing perspectives on how we might understand this attribution of blame, this paper argues that their guilt is best explained not through changes in behaviour but through the conjuncture of shifts in education policy and related research. (Power, 2006, p. 175)

Another view on the matter might involve the downgrading of the teaching profession by the society as a whole because of the dominance of women in education. It is not a large jump then to consider that there could be, as PW claims, a nexus between the approaches of government to schools and the policies that control them and a view by policy makers that a profession that so involves women might not be a profession that should be seen as one that could be considered exemplary, one that should be supported with high levels of devolved authority.

> There are limited robust data on the relative levels of competence of male and female teachers. Such evidence as there is on competence, as indicated by awards at point of entry to the profession, suggests a higher level of performance by women. In spite of the difficulties of defining what is meant by the term "profession," there is some support for the contention that high levels of feminisation can result in lower professional status for an occupation, and teaching is no exception to this. (Drudy, 2008, p. 319)

Principal and School Effectiveness

None of the school leaders involved in this study took the view that leading and managing a school was easy; school leadership was difficult, even more difficult if constant improvement and innovative practice were goals. There was evidence of real belief in the importance of their own ability and work ethic, but a paucity of belief in the system's capacity (or will) to assist them in tangible, realistic ways.

For my case study principals, the ability to change was based around capacity building and the need for genuine local authority and properly resourced and specified SBM. They said that capacity building required trust between people working within and outside the school. It required school leaders to use all forms of relevant information effectively and it required pragmatic decisions and for leaders' to have excellent interpersonal skills. It required experience and, at times, subterfuge as well as determination and courage. Change was not possible in isolation from the total school system nor from the society at large. Often, participants said, the government and the system simply ignored the complexities that underscored their leadership.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis provided detailed information about what the participating principals believed were the positive drivers of success and innovation at the school level. These were, ipso facto, personal perspectives about principal effectiveness, providing clear indications about what the participating principals thought really mattered if innovative practice was to become the norm in NSW secondary schools. They said there was a permanent tension between their views on purpose and process, the values they held, the pathways to student success, and what the system seemed to believe mattered.

Parylo and Zepeda (2014), in a United States study about how district leaders (superintendents) viewed successful principals, put forward a set of characteristics that

were associated with principal effectiveness. This work was partly based on an analysis

of relevant literature: "Although there is no agreement about an ultimate definition of an

effective principal, the literature review points to certain characteristics, skills and

abilities that successful leaders possess and exhibit" (p. 519). There were striking

parallels between the "effectiveness" perspectives of this study's participants and the

views of the American superintendents. The commonalities set out below were

developed both from my participating principals (paraphrased from their perspectives)

about the drivers of school and principal success and the material in the Parylo and

Zepeda paper. The common traits were: experience and developed capacity; contextual

understanding; effective management of resources and operational processes; the

importance of instructional leadership and curriculum; effective use of data and

evidence; team leadership and interpersonal skill; and, passion and purpose.

These traits are also broadly consistent with Edmonds' (1982) criteria (the so-

called "correlates of effective schooling"): strong, active leadership; a focus on

instructional practice; positive climate; high expectations; the use of data; and,

embedded program evaluation. Edmonds' criteria of course do not *directly* address

principal characteristics of effectiveness but are about the related matter of the processes

that were present in those schools that were performing effectively.

Brady (2014), who discussed the many broad imperatives required if school

improvement was to be successful, provided a list of the strategies that he believed

would facilitate improvement for students. He pointed out that "the criteria for school

effectiveness remain substantially the same across researchers" (p. 6) and in reading the

detailed history in his paper, those criteria appeared to have remained fairly stable

across a number of decades. In summary, he provided a list of eight effectiveness

imperatives that, by way of proving his point, he said had changed little over time and

were not substantively different to Edmonds' correlates, although the language had changed somewhat. Brady's imperatives for school improvement were: adopt a student-centred orientation; emphasise teaching and learning; promote distributed leadership; monitor student progress; develop skills for promoting change; connect with the community, embed professional learning; and, sustain improvement.

What was missing from both the now 35-year-old work of Edmonds and the much more recent works of Parylo and Zepeda (2014) and Brady (2014) is the desirability for the traits of principal and school effectiveness to have practical expression if improvements are to occur particularly in an era of increasing SBM. Parylo and Zepeda concluded that "the findings of the present study indicate that conversations need to continue to tie down the notions of effective leadership from abstractions and thoughts to words and actions" (p. 535).

Relying on inventories of school and principal effectiveness can mask the influences of crucial variables that may impact schooling outcomes. Checklists often mean little in isolation from the actual day-to-day leadership and management of schools (Ladwig & Gore, 2009), and poorly convey the key messages about *how* and *why* effective schools and effective principals reach their effective states. Nor do they explain how impeding environments interact with the tools needed for success. Parylo and Zepeda (2014) said that "almost every account used for the analysis contained at least one list" (p. 532) and in their discussion, they pointed out how common general characteristics lists were during their literature search.

My case study principals said that it was near impossible for a school or a principal to reach full effectiveness given the current NSW educational environment. The external environment in effect provided a ceiling, a limit that dynamically interacted with a principal's leadership capacity if they were trying to establish reform

at their site. Nevertheless they said that they constantly *tried* to achieve full effectiveness and part of this effort involved being conscious of the drivers and impediments that affected their particular situation, their context.

The problem with checklists and sets of criteria about effectiveness is that once context, management complexity, and the particulars of the people who work at a site are taken into account, lists of effectiveness can look shallow or worse, they might be applied shallowly (Harris & Jones, 2015). If the reason for check listing was to obtain change, to improve outcomes, to improve practice at every level, then the lists need to include information about why and how effectiveness could be achieved in real-world, particular, school operational settings. What is missed, for example, is information about how the effectiveness criteria actually relate to crucial enabling concepts— concepts like the importance of intrinsic motivation for change, concepts like the need for genuine coherence, and concepts about how system-wide relationships based on effective subsidiarity could interact with the staffing and resourcing needs that develop during change periods.

Participants were cognisant about how their personal abilities would be constantly interacting with their total professional environment. It was clear that they believed pathways to reaching maximum effectiveness were steep, difficult, and took many unpredictable twists and turns. Several of the transcripts implied (and one participant commented unequivocally) that their personal traits of effectiveness could not always be maximised because they were part of a much bigger picture that provided constraint, diverted energy, and at times disrespected their importance in the organisation. Through the perspectives they offered during the interviews, the participating principals provided their own accounts of what kinds of interventions

made principal and school effectiveness a shallow proposition in NSW schools. These can be summarised as follows:

- Excessive bureaucratic intervention

- System-controlled SBM (in itself an oxymoron)

- Poor trust of the principalship

- "Silos" in senior management arguing between themselves about scarce resources

- Insufficient resource flexibility at school level combined with high levels of financial scrutiny

- Politically or media-driven accountability approaches too often generating data that did not in practice assist schools to improve

- The complexity of leading and managing schools in a prevailing culture of "us and them"

- Overwhelming amounts of unfocussed, peripheral reform

- Excessively standardised, inflexible, and union-dominated staffing rules

- Blockages and irrelevances that the system ignored

- Entrenched system inertia and culture of risk aversion

- An excessive, constraining policy environment with excessive compliance

- Incoherence and a lack of acceptance that everybody in the organisation is responsible for improvement

- System ambivalence about school contextual complexity and poor understanding of how change works or how to lead it

- Apparent system ambivalence about the need to build and sustain innovative cultures at school level

These potential impediments might be summarised by repeating what a number of my case study participants reported—that the system does not understand change and, since the system directly affects their professional environment, change and innovation become difficult to achieve.

People leading complex organisations have always had to manage complexity (Caldwell, 2004; Holmes et al., 2013). The issue supported by every participant that arose from the data of this study was that the array and significance of impediments to the already challenging task of effective school principalship had been increasing in the era of increased SBM. Furthermore, depending upon the particular issues at play and the context of their schools, they were also of the opinion that these impediments were increasingly difficult to overcome.

Leithwood et al. (2008) considered a broad range of empirical studies about effective school leadership. The studies chosen were all supported by significant amounts of evidence. The result of what they termed "a preliminary view" of a very complex research effort provided a list of seven "strong claims" about school leadership. Of particular interest for this discussion about principal and school effectiveness was claim number three:

> The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices, not the practices themselves, demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work. (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 27)

The data from my research might indicate that attempts in much of the literature to establish what amounts to "checklists" are dangerous because they are so easily misinterpreted and they so easily misrepresent the complexity of the principals' role in the current era. Bland lists of desirables or imperatives have the potential to reduce genuine understanding of the "real-world" issues, and that could easily lead to systems

and governments making inappropriate decisions about policy that could actually interfere with site-level reform. The inference I want to draw is that if policy makers can better understand the realities of leading an effective school, they could make positive changes that might mitigate against the impediments that this study has illuminated.

Holistic Reform

While this study focusses on principal perceptions, it is important that my research not be mistaken as adopting an insular view of what matters in schools. Admittedly, the design of the current study privileges the principal's perspective but the evidence clearly indicates that the participating principals were often at odds with system-authorised "script" for reform and there seems little doubt that the principals' perceived lack of trust and feelings of "us and them" arise from this to a considerable extent. This study's evidence is replete with examples of the numerous ways in which the participating principals saw their roles as an integral and intimately nested part of their school's operations and collegial networks, but also broader educational and social endeavours, and the importance of building leadership capacity in schools and the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.

While they believed that they could make a difference as individual leaders, or working as part of a principal group, they were clear that they were part of a larger whole—a system of public education that they believed had great value to society. They saw their responsibilities as embedded, structured and influenced by this broader whole. Nevertheless, the interview data demonstrated that the impediments to reform and innovation that participants identified were significant in number, challenging, and widespread across their work environment. Significant, sustained improvements in innovative practice, according to the perceptions of this study's participants, would need to be holistic in nature, requiring changes in policy, practice, authority, and subsidiarity,

inter alia. They also recognised the place of corporate ethos, school culture, and their personal endeavours in seeking the desired reforms. They believed that sustainable reform could be triggered by recognising the value of effective, contextually based leadership of school principals.

There was evidence that the participants saw their own professional development journeys as ongoing but the existence of SBM was not a major factor. While the system provided a policy supporting SBM, from most participants' point of view, this had not in practice led to significant increases in SBM. The system authorised changes towards increased autonomy they saw as being unlikely to make much difference in their developmental journeys. Of more importance was their daily realities in particular the challenges of operating their schools in a sea of complexity and change.

A case-in-point example of this was offered by PT in Chapter 6 in the area of financial control (an important element for managing locally). The system's dogged adherence to the SAP-based business model called LMBR (Learning Management and Business Reform) had reduced financial clarity, continued to cause difficulty in use, and had generated staff stress for several years at school level. In so doing, it had upset the effective operation of many aspects of daily school operations generating considerable anxiety. The system's inflexibility was supporting a failed system mandate. What PT called the "rank incompetence" of LMBR, meant he was no longer fully aware of his local financial position, effectively diminishing his authority and credibility as principal. It was another example of a lack of system thoughtfulness about trust, authority, and coherence that he claimed had extended to impact his staff and therefore his students.

There was evidence that as far back as 1999, the SPC was calling for proactive changes that could add value to the quality of learning processes and improve the

outcomes of learning in public secondary schools. Their "futures" paper (NSW SPC, 1999b) called for significant change not just in finance, curriculum, system structures, technology, reporting, and operational management but also for increased flexibility to allow principals to manage individual schools, or groups of schools, without losing sight of the basic values of equity and social justice. It also called for principals to think about how to move forward in new ways.

The data from this study indicate that little progress has been attained in the SPC's "Futures" goals. During 1998 and 1999, I was a member of the SPC executive and was tasked by my colleagues to establish and direct the Futures Project. The goals for change that developed during the Project were optimistic, well researched, and laudable. Unfortunately there were significant gaps in understanding how such change might happen in real-world settings for principals working within a politically governed, large, complex system with entropic tendencies. That is, the document fell short on the practicalities and pressures associated with the implementation of its goals.

Given the perspectives offered by the principals in the current study, much has been learned since 1999 and, perhaps sadly, the optimism of that time has been replaced by a more measured view, a more comprehensive and global view, and perhaps a more cynical view, of how change might eventually be achieved, of the real-world effects of the drivers and impediments that are actually operating. The experienced principal participants who have contributed to this study seem aware of the holistic nature of change required to obtain increases in innovation for their schools but they also believe that the individual principal plays a very important part in this. The data further indicate that the participating principals' capacity to respond to the impediments and complexities that they experience remains constrained.

In this thesis I have made no attempt to overtly challenge or critique the participants' comments, beliefs and views. The methodology required that any aspect of their professional environment could be discussed, as long as it related to the interview questions (and therefore, the inquiry questions). The study and its outcomes were quite openly based on perceptions. I did not contest the assumptions or biases of the participants directly, but I have engaged in some depth with the perspectives that they espoused through detailed analysis of relevant literature in this Chapter.

It would be useful to further explore the motivations for the views and beliefs expressed by the participants but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. There is clearly great scope for future research that does engage in stronger critique of school leader statements but, any such approach may require a different methodology.

Self-belief

PX posited that there had been a quantum shift in how the system interacted with schools. He said it was no longer about guidelines: "everything is regulated or needs permission yet the Public Schools Directors know less about schools than they used to because they don't visit principals much at all." PT said principals are "on their own" and throughout the data this concept was strongly evident among participants. With trust apparently in short supply, my case study principals revealed that they felt isolated. There was an unspoken view—a hidden underpinning within participant statements—that the skills for daily "survival" as a principal included self-belief combined with a pleasantly disguised "inner steel." This concept also became evident in their views about principal development, about the importance of mentoring, about how difficult the role had become, and what could be done about it for their colleagues and for those aspiring to principalship.

Leithwood et al. (2008) in exploring school effectiveness discussed this issue of self-belief, of a principal's sense of efficacy, and said:

This sense of efficacy in turn shaped the nature of headteachers' [principals'] leadership practices; highlighted the relationship between these practices and such things as decision-making processes in their schools; and had an indirect but significant influence on pupils' learning and achievement. (p. 36)

Cultural Change

Nurturing and sustaining a culture of innovation is critical to the transformation of schools and to energizing the principalship at a time when many doubt that the role is feasible. (Caldwell, 2004, p. 88)

More than a decade has passed since that statement was written by that respected Australian academic and educator. Of concern was that the data that has been gathered from my case study points clearly to the lack of a nurturing and sustaining culture where innovation was supported at their secondary school sites. The data also points to doubts the participating principals held about the feasibility of their role in schools. The participants indicated that it was not just their roles that were increasingly difficult, but also the roles of their staff. Indeed, the view was put that, as principals, part of their job was to prevent the system's demands from "interfering" with the crucial part of their teachers' jobs, a crucial part of which was quality teaching. There was strong support in the literature about how important teachers' roles and cooperation could be in obtaining success for reform agendas (Day, 2002; Dinham et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2003). MacNeil et al. (2009), who were unequivocal about the importance of positive school cultures for successful teaching and learning, noted that:

Strong school cultures have better motivated teachers. Highly motivated teachers have greater success in terms of student performance and student outcomes. School principals seeking to improve student performance should focus on improving the school's culture by getting the relationships right between themselves, their teachers, students and parents. (p. 77)

In a detailed discussion about the value of a coherent, system-wide approach to reform and innovation in Ontario, Fullan and Quinn (2016) posited that educational systems could not succeed in obtaining effective, sustainable reform without "the support and ownership of the reform agenda by teachers" (p. 39). They took the view that growth of performance outcomes has to be "from within, augmented by experts" and a situation had to prevail such that the reform processes sent "strong messages to teachers and leaders that their input was valued" (p. 40). They asserted that the right drivers for change incorporated clear, achievable, ambitious goals; created system-wide collaborative cultures; built teaching and learning capacity everywhere; and, used non-punitive accountability approaches.

The eight participants in this study made it clear through their implicit and explicit statements that overcoming the barriers to site-based innovation would require significant cultural change but importantly, they reported that the imperative for change applied far more to their external environment than to the environment within their schools. Participants expressed frustration that it was exceptionally difficult for a principal to generate effective local cultural change in the face of what they saw as a negative external environment. They felt that they were entangled in an increasingly controlling state of organisational press but had little reciprocal power to control the external forces they experienced. They accepted that the responsibility for developing supportive school cultures and improved teaching and learning outcomes was theirs.

They understood that efforts to improve school culture had to include their staff and community in supporting change agendas. The problem was that there were simply too many external policies, influences, and directives overriding progress towards cultural change at their schools.

The theoretical frame for this study (see Chapter 3) posited that identifying the right school improvement criteria in combination with positive system drivers provides the preconditions for cultural change. In a variety of ways, during the interviews, my case study principals discussed the importance of "stepping forward" to lead their schools: to lead excellence in teaching (instruction); to keep their staff positive and to promote the "right" climate and if necessary, to protect staff from outside influences and distractions. Part of this work required setting up appropriate internal accountability processes and effective learning programs, matters that align with the study's theoretical frame. However, the kinds of positive *system* drivers needed to facilitate change were perceived as few and far between, and the impediments many. Within the confines of their own schools, the participating principals saw many of the opportunities for external drive and support for change either lost, ignored, or misdirected, and felt that the weight of securing change was falling almost exclusively on their shoulders. Their sentiments echoed many of the matters raised by leading experts like Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves on what was needed to achieve sustainable school and whole-system reform and the all-too-common risk of choosing the "wrong" drivers (Fullan, 2000a, 2000b, 2011; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves et al., 2009). A major theme from the data was that participants strongly believed that positive drivers for change tended to be local and that inappropriate centralist policies exacerbated the problems of obtaining site-based innovation. Seven of the eight participants were of the view that, in practical terms, "one-size-fits-all"

thinking and the concomitant devaluing of the importance of school leaders had diminished the power of principals to achieve change within schools.

My participating principals gave examples that supported many of the "right" drivers for system reform outlined by Fullan and Hargreaves. They also expressed strong views that the system did not really understand how change worked and that the system's reliance on inappropriate accountability and ad hoc reform strategies, had helped to strengthen and expand the number of impediments.

Fullan took the view that for whole-system reform you should not lead with the "wrong" drivers—not that he believed they were always or necessarily wrong, but the right drivers should be where "dominance" was evident in terms of system strategy. Fullan (2011) posited that "if you want to be successful at whole system reform, then base your dominant set of strategies on the four right drivers in combination" (p. 5). He pointed to "allness" as a right driver, while focussing on individual incentives/recognition (and personal responsibility for success and failure), above and beyond the collective culture, as among the "culprits" that could inhibit effective change. Certainly, this study's participants wanted to see changes to the way the whole system operated, but they also wanted to see their roles as school leaders upheld and valued. This study's results suggest that valuing, upholding, supporting, and building school and system cultures around school leaders that are progressing successful, situationally based leadership, might be one of the pathways to obtaining more successful school outcomes but, as Fullan pointed out, *leading* change based upon the capacity of each individual leader was not likely to be a successful strategy. The changes being made by the system, participants said, failed to recognise the contribution of school leaders; system reforms often in practice worked against "allness." Participants felt that properly valuing and understanding the issues of change leadership

at school level had to be an integral part of any overall system-wide cultural change. Such understandings might allow for effective contextual leadership to be integrated into whole-system reforms, providing that those reforms were designed to be inclusive, coherent and led with the "right" drivers for change. They implied that given what they saw as system ineptitude, their effectiveness at the moment rested far too heavily on their leadership and management capacities. Further, context and capacity intertwined to become a complex mix that manifested itself in varying levels of real-world effectiveness depending upon person and place.

Underlying so many of the participants' answers to the interview questions was a pervading sense that an improved culture across the whole system was desperately needed. What my participants implied was lacking in NSW were system processes that increased intrinsic motivation, a problem that Fullan saw as of fundamental concern. Seven of the participants indicted that this deficiency was born from a system culture that provided an excessive number of impediments to progress at school level. What participants indicated was needed was *genuine* cultural change—more shared responsibility, more trust and inclusion, better understanding of the importance of school and corporate cultures, the place of community and the salience of students.

The participating principals indicated that constantly increasing teaching and learning capacity was important and a crucial part of their role but acting upon this was something that primarily schools and principals did, not the system, because too many system policies were tangential to, or even (inadvertently) worked against, this very important focus. It was not that they thought that principals should be entirely responsible for such fundamental educational processes as teaching and learning improvement but the reality was that the system, by its actions, ethos, and omissions, forced them to carry most of that load. In their opinion, this was a crucial system failure.

Furthermore, system support structures were often ineffectual because they did not properly account for different contexts and the great variation of the people within them. Their effectiveness was further reduced because they seemed unable to work together in a concerted fashion.

The participating principals emphasised the importance of local staff support for any principal leading change. They emphasised the cost to their leadership if local planning and local innovation was seen as "unimportant" because of system actions and "one-size-fits-all" approaches. They pointed to the need for clarity of purpose, courage, and determination, and the successes of leadership based on appropriate data and experience in managing system impediments. That is, the individual principal, their skills, their grasp of their particular context, their understanding from experience of how to obtain change in the real-world settings—that was how change happened from their point of view. This heavy burden might be alleviated to the extent that the system enabled and led organisation-wide cultural change.

Throughout the data there were indicators that genuine coherence was a "bridge too far" in NSW. There were many impediments to change and those positive drivers the participating principals discussed were about localism and their leadership, colleague support, university expertise and input, and shared ideas among principals of what might work. Positive drivers did not appear regularly in the external environment that related to the system. Too often, throughout the system, there were wrong people in the wrong places, they said, and Public Schools Directors could be "handcuffed" by politics and/or *their* supervisors, with the result being that, like principals, they were sometimes unable to freely put forward their views, never mind take actions to support them. Too often, the Director's motivation for particular decisions was questionable (at least in the eyes of my case study principals). As Gough Whitlam, a former Australian

Prime Minister once famously commented, "the punters know that the horse named Morality rarely gets past the post, whereas the nag named Self-interest always runs a good race" (Whitlam, 1989, as cited in Andrews, 1993, p. 824).

Leadership and Leadership Development

Dinham et al. (2011) discussed leadership development in Australia over recent decades in the following way:

> This focus on school leadership and educational effectiveness resulted in a variety of leadership theories, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, constructivist leadership, servant leadership, cultural leadership, and primal leadership. (p. 141)

Dinham et al. discussed this wide range of leadership theories, drawing on the work of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) who, according to Dinham et al., took the view that many of these leadership theories appear to be no more than "slogans" that did not rely on a cohesive conceptual framework. The concern was that the jargon did not necessarily point to significant bodies of evidence about particular leadership theories. Dinham et al. then referred to the growing appreciation of the importance of distributed leadership but cautioned that this was not saying that distributed leadership was necessarily the best way to frame such an important matter as educational leadership.

Given the prominence of SBM in my study, distributed leadership was a matter of significant interest. Harris (2009) considered distributed leadership as:

> primarily concerned with the co-performance of leadership practice and the nature of the interactions that contribute to that co-performance. In this model,

formal leaders prompt emergent and creative actions among groups to whom

leadership is distributed and those in formal leadership roles emphasise the

management of interdependencies, rather than controls over process or

outcomes. (p. 3)

There was clear evidence in the transcripts of interview that, while the

participating principals actively pursued this type of distributed leadership in their

schools, they suffered because of the incongruity with what happened in the system

above them in terms of recognition and control.

For leadership to work effectively in schools, Fullan (2003) stressed the

importance of having appropriate processes in place to motivate people towards

achieving the wider organisation's goals. The perceptions of my case study principals

indicated that such processes were few in number and not carefully considered. In some

cases, this was a major source of their disillusionment towards the system. For example,

PS and PY saw direct linkages between the system's lack of trust and their motivation

to lead. There was a pervasive (although admittedly variable) feeling amongst the

participating principals that they were not really trusted by their superiors. This was

compounded by the system's ethos of control and government interventionist policies so

that the participating principals felt they only controlled some of the resources needed to

engender change in their schools.

Blasé (2005) promulgated the view that leaders working with large groups faced

a host of micro political influences. Blasé posited that within a single school there

would be extensive and ongoing micro political actions operating throughout the staff,

brought on by decision-making structures, "submerged processes," and teacher

empowerment concerns. Blasé took the view that SBM was a reform where micro

politics could play a significant role as one of the most important forces impacting on

the effectiveness of a school. While the current study did not directly probe this aspect, it was still surprising that so little of the data implicated the micro political, especially given the emphasis on SBM and school-based reform. Whether an artefact of the study or a conscious perception, the participants expressed global views and appeared to simply accept (or in the extreme, ignore) the micro political machinations surrounding their leadership. Either way, this is an aspect worthy of future research particularly as it relates to SBM.

Not necessarily wishing to add to the jargon, the expression "accomplished pragmatism" catches much of what is deeply ingrained in the current study's data about the motivation and modus operandi of the participating principals. It then follows that these experienced leaders advocated a new principal development regime based around mentorship that emphasises real-world expression of leadership and details "real-world" pathways to school effectiveness—mentorship that focuses on understanding, promoting, and sustaining the complex multifaceted interrelationships between principal, school, and system. Two of the participating principals were scathing of the DEC's current principal development efforts, seeing these fixed and inflexible learning modules as a simplistic and moribund manifestation of system control. They were adamant that principal leadership development needed to go far deeper and include practical "on-the-job" training to help new principals fully understand and artfully navigate a potentially hostile system.

Sustaining Moral Purpose

My case study principals were acutely aware of the forces vying for political and economic control in society that would inevitably impact their students' lives. Fullan (2001, 2003) noted the importance of moral purpose for educators. Defined by Fullan as

making a positive difference in the lives of students, including the potential to increase their learning outcomes, the moral dimension is a critical motivator for principles in addressing the enormity of sustaining complex reform. The participants saw the moral purpose and meaning of their leadership as hinging on their students in particular and students elsewhere leaving school with sound life prospects and the best possible academic success. They strongly upheld the values of public, secular education as a key entitlement of a just society and pathway to socio-economic wellbeing and equity. They saw embellishing innovative practice in their schools as quintessential to their higher purpose and crucial to improving performance in their schools.

Mayo (2012) analysed the contributions of Freire in identifying the discipline of "critical pedagogy" as a philosophically reasoned union of education with critical theory that pointed to the need for empowerment, principle, and knowledge about the forces present in students' lives. My purpose here is to reflect on how notions of critical pedagogy are reflected in the opportunities the case study principals sought for the students in their care. The participants were acutely aware and deeply concerned about the socio-educational backgrounds, current challenges, and pathways facing their students and had limited faith in tests and examinations and external accountability regimes. Freire (2012) said:

> Choice and decision necessarily underscore the importance of education. Education which must never be neutral, can be at the service either of decision, of world transformation and of critical insertion within the world, or of immobility and the possible permanence of unjust structures, of human beings settling for a reality which seems untouchable. (p. 48)

Students in public schools encompass the full range of socio-economic, parental, and community backgrounds. PX, PZ, and PW in particular emphasised these concerns.

Freire and Milani centred their views on importance of relating education *to* life, emphasising what was culturally relevant and not what was culturally alienating (Mayo, 2012). As Eacott (2011) cautioned, school leadership can "fail to adequately engage with the complexity of social life and the ebbs and flows of human and organisational interaction" (p. 52). There was an underlying concern amongst the study's principals that external examination results and other externally imposed controls and accountabilities captured too little of what mattered if the goal was to provide increased life opportunities for their students.

The principal participants saw the political and system rhetoric around accountability and control as shallow, facile, and damaging to their student's interests. They accepted but placed significant caveats around the usefulness and importance of external data in targeting improvement strategies and were especially critical of narrow, partial, and cross-sectional interpretations that could be misleading and damaging to schools but they were not against accountability per se.

Biesta (2009) commented that "the rise of measurement culture in education has had a profound impact on educational practice, from the highest levels of educational policy at national and supra-national level down to the practices of local schools and teachers" (p. 34). The participating principals were well aware of the complexities this presented for their schools and concerned about how these impacted on the prospects of their students. They saw many of these as beyond their control. It was not that the principals acquiesced; in fact, they were forthright about their skill, experience, courage, and knowledge and determined about the education offered at *their* schools meeting the full spectrum of student needs.

Day et al. (2011) emphasised that:

Leadership success … depends significantly on leaders' values and qualities, and on the skill with which leaders understand the underlying causes of the problems they encounter and respond to those problems in ways that are productive in context, not in general. Contexts, from this perspective, are unavoidable elements of the problems leaders need to solve if they are to improve their organizations. Failure to understand and respond suitably to one's context is a formula for inadequate solution finding and weak leadership. (p. 3)

The participating principals' perceptions often seemed premised on self-belief. They saw their role as making a crucial difference in their community and more broadly, as helping to build a better society. Leadership to them was active and responsive rather than passive and accepting, albeit tempered by an array of limitations, not least of all their own capacity.

As Seashore (2009) noted, "the fact that control over change is elusive does not imply that leadership is unimportant" (p. 136). While the participants recognised significant barriers and constraints, they believed that their evidence-based local actions and belief in the power of intrinsically motivated teaching were vital components of their school's ability to innovate. Their perspective was that they had been doing the best they could, making progress in difficult circumstances.

The clear implication from many of the concerns raised by the participants about being "marooned in the middle" was that the tensions between the external and internal drivers and impediments to change were essentially irreconcilable and unresolvable, leaving the principal to push forward nevertheless.

In the current study, PX commented directly on this problem, a problem that he believed presented a serious impediment to change. He stated that he ignored certain system requirements, policies, and directives (as did PY, PW, and PS). "Local

imperatives had to be put first," he said and that meant carefully supporting staff so they could do everything possible for their students. In taking such a stance, these four principals adopted a moral position based upon what mattered to them in getting the job done, a job that mattered for their school, their students and their community; getting the job done accorded with the "real purpose" of their work. Summarising these four participants' comments, you could say that a principal's energy and capacity were not limitless; you just had to prioritise while never losing sight of purpose. Notwithstanding, there was no indication across the 23 interviews conducted during my study that the participants were not absolutely prepared to be accountable to the system and their community for their actions and decisions.

Day et al. (1999) reported on an extensive set of qualitative case studies from England and Wales that focussed upon the views of principals, teachers, and relevant others about leadership, with particular reference to personal values and how participants saw meaning in their efforts. Their evidence "suggests that it is the powerful role played by values which is a key determinant of effective school leadership" (p. 27). Leadership reality, at least for the principals (headteachers) involved in the Day et al. study, was about values, tensions, and decision-making dilemmas. It also appears that at least some school staff members were cognisant of the "marooned in the middle" reality of their leaders.

Day et al. provided a quote from one of their participating principals about a comment made by a staff member:

Changes are externally imposed so that the head must interpret incoming documents before she can inform the staff. The speed with which those changes have had to be introduced means that she has had little time to motivate staff and

she is finding it increasingly difficult to justify imposing yet more demands for

change. (p. 18)

This statement resonates strongly with the evidence gathered in my research.

Meier (2012) also concurs with this view commenting that even where a public school

can establish itself as genuinely innovative and successful, it will nevertheless "continue

to feel the effects of federal and state standardization and accountability efforts" (p.

819).

The material in the literature relating to moral purpose and the complexity of

enacting one's purpose in leadership situations reflects many of the crucial matters

raised by my case study principals. They clearly did not agree with some of the values

and purposes that underpinned government and system reforms and, even where they

did agree, they often disagreed with the system about how a given reform might be

achieved.

PW, PY, PT, and PS considered that the system and many of its senior people

simply did not understand how change worked and, by implication, the "real world"

role of principals. All the participating principals were experienced and outwardly

effective, and reported no significant difficulties in their work. Both directly and

indirectly, they articulated the importance of vision, sound planning, understanding their

professional environment, and the importance of values and purpose.

It is interesting that, even though the current study and Day et al.'s (1999) work

were separated by 17 years, and undertaken in different national contexts, the matters of

concern raised by principals were so closely aligned. For example, Day et al. noted that

the UK principals:

empowered staff by developing climates of collaboration, by applying high

standards to themselves and others, by seeking the support of various influential

groups within the school community and by keeping "ahead of the game" through ensuring that they had a national strategic view of what is current and what is to come. They managed tensions between dependency and autonomy, between caution and courage, between maintenance and development; and their focus was always upon the betterment of the young people and staff who worked in their schools. They remained enthusiastic and committed to learning. (p. 28)

Both studies identified concerns with simplistic, business oriented, and ideologically driven policies that imposed on school-level operational complexities.

Biesta (2009) called for a return to the sincere examination of the purposes of education, considering system dictates and requirements to express particular value judgements. Biesta concluded that if these external values overrode decisions that mattered at the local level then they could have negative effects. My case study principals reported that such negative effects were ever present in the unsteady tension between system and local values arising from actual policies or personalities involved. The participating principals saw this manifested in the confounding and costly disparities between the large, cumbersome NSW system and more nimble and adaptive leadership in schools.

Optimising Authority

Fullan and Quinn (2016) were unequivocal in their view that under-valuing the place of "allness," intrinsic motivation, purpose, values, and supportive system environments has had a significant negative impact on educational reform. They emphasised that "when people are operating in conditions of high trust, collaboration, and effective leadership, they are more willing to innovate and take risks" (p. 26). Motivation of this kind was at the heart of the matters that the participants raised in this

study. While it was acknowledged that the system, its support structures, and its senior personnel could provide assistance, the general perception was that the system far too often complicated and impeded forward progress at school level.

PW believed that we live in a period of fluidity, ambiguity, and disruptive influences throughout society and the economy, and that schools were not exempt from this. Achieving success in such an environment required significant understanding, determination, clear thinking, and leadership skill. Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggested that "leaders need the ability to develop a shared moral purpose and meaning as well as a pathway for obtaining that purpose" (p. 17).

All the participants explained that they had innovative practices underway that they believed suited their context and that aligned with their views of the purposes of education. With the exception of PU however, little credit for innovative successes was given to their supervisors, school districts, or the system as a whole. Almost inexplicably, it was the system and its personnel they saw as standing in the way of their school-level reform agendas.

Fullan and Quinn (2016) expressed deep concern about what they referred to as the "vacuum of direction" caused by systems "jumping from one ad hoc policy to another" (p. 136). Bates (2013) saw this arising from an unrealistic "technical-rational" system change ethos that "assumes a 'mechanistic' reality where change can be predicted and control centrally maintained through simple cause and effect manipulations" (p. 39). Concerns of these kinds resonated strongly with the participating principals' apprehensions about current system-led reform agendas and the diminishing place of principal authority (reflected in Question 2 of the Phase 3 interview protocols).

Wohlstetter et al. (2008) discussed matters of decision making and authority (including decision making based on data), pointing to the benefits of seeing authority interactions as part of an interactive framework of principal and agent. They noted that "at the heart of principal-agent theory is a contract specifying decision rights" (p. 241). Wohlstetter et al.'s qualitative research indicated that school leaders needed considerable systemic support if they were to be successful but, at the same time, needed sufficient autonomy to make effective local decisions. However, given that school principals do not operate in an environment that is value free, matters become more complex. In summary, as a result of their findings they suggested that "a process of mutual accountability between schools and systems also created a climate in which schools engaged in a process of continuous improvement and in which systems actually had accurate information about what was occurring at the school level" (p. 258). They saw effective principal–agent relationships as hinging on understandings of the perspectives that different levels of an education system brought to that relationship.

In reality, policy and compliance requirements are applied differentially to the principals and agents (subordinates) of organisations (Aghion & Tirole, 2016) because of the different responsibilities of subordinates and principals. This appears in my study's data as an important contributing factor in the "us-and-them" concerns of my school leaders.

Aghion and Tirole (2016) took a detailed, mathematically based approach to understanding the place of "real" authority in complex organisational interactions that equated strongly with the issues raised by my participants. Aghion and Tirole's paper built equations to help understand principal-actor authority relationships based on the identification and interaction of an array of authority affecting factors. For the purposes of the current study, looking upward from schools, the "principals" would be senior

officers, district leaders, directors in education, senior bureaucrats in other public

agencies, government ministers, and so on. The subordinates (or agents) would be

school principals.

What was of great value from Aghion and Tirole's paper was that my case study

principals clearly indicated their beliefs that insufficient thought had gone into the

issues of authority sharing and that this had generated reductions in their site-level

performance. The participating principals' views strongly concurred with Aghion and

Tirole's concerns about critical issues affecting authority and flexibility. These include:

the trade-off between loss of (system) control and gains in local initiative; optimal

application of formal authority and subsidiary relationships; the factors that favour

initiative and change; problems arising from excessive executive oversight (or lack of

it); authority splitting and the possible returns arising from this; the "real" span of

control of subordinates and principals; principal role overload arising from diminished

local authority; political positioning by principals and subordinates; and, the impact of

the siloed and insular practices of support units within the DoE and external to schools.

The work of Aghion and Tirole (2016) verified and gave substance to what my

case study principals saw as the costly mess of authority, planning, policy support, and

lack of trust surrounding their work. These authors' complex mathematical models were

effective in enlightening and empirically deconstructing these otherwise elusive

phenomena but offered little in terms of ready solutions. However, their work pointed

clearly to the interrelated complexity of contemporary leadership environments and in

that sense, helped explain the variety and rigour of approaches my participants

discussed in relation to the leadership of their schools.

Research Mentality

For this study, the sample was small, it was a qualitative multiple case study approach and the research questions were quite focussed around the processes of leadership and management of the participants' schools. Nevertheless, given the depth of the results as tabled and the commonality of many perspectives given by participants there was value in undertaking this research because it illuminated important activities both internal and external to a school that supported or impeded innovative practice. In doing so it has cast some light on matters of "real world" school and principal effectiveness.

The research was designed to provide interested educators with a deeper understanding of some reasons why educational change has seemed so difficult over so many decades. The underlying basis for my approach to this study was the researcher's belief that exploring the work of principals undertaking their roles *in situ* could provide useful gains in the understanding of how leaders might succeed at developing effective, innovative schools. The focus was to dive deeply into those matters that could assist secondary principals within the NSW public school sector to make their schools a more successful and more innovative enterprise. It became clear that participants believed that there was an imbalance between assisting and restricting forces.

The size of the participating group had to be small given the limitations I faced working as an individual researcher. The eight case studies were spread across significant separation distances and the visit order had to be totally at the convenience of the busy participants. Time had to be taken to build a safe, assured, professional relationship between participant and researcher.

To achieve the research goals, this work had to be about seeing past simple stories of success or disaffection by the busy, sometimes stressed people leading the

participating schools. It involved building and analysing a set of data that was broad-ranging and complex, based on perceived realities. The data had to have the potential to provide meaning in terms of the research questions. In undertaking this work, values, purposes, personal histories, reasons for professional decisions, chosen workplace processes, comments about other people, professional traumas, and so on, all these came into play to one extent or another depending on the particular participant. Sometimes such matters appeared directly as overt statements in the recordings but sometimes, they were an identifiable undercurrent behind participant perceptions.

To not acknowledge that any deep, perceptually based exploration of professional matters among senior people would include purpose and values would be dishonest and imply a lower level of thought and complexity about the work than was the case. The study data demonstrated that at many levels, the issue of purpose and values loomed large, if not overtly then covertly. While this added to the complexity of both results and analysis, it substantiated and authenticated and gave increased meaning to the information. As Begley and Johansson (2003) stated: "[O]ver the past several decades, scholars of educational administration have begun to recognize the importance of values for those individuals we charge with running schools" (p. 33).

While the study certainly had limitations, there might now be further scope for informed discourse about the real-world effectiveness of principals who are trying to lead innovative schools. As explicated by the participating principals in their different ways, leadership towards innovation transcends a vast array of impediments and requires determined, knowledgeable, and highly personalised leadership. Begley and Johansson (2006) said, "[I]nnovation is linked to a faith in personal ability and a willingness to cut through the accepted limits of thinking and behaviour" (p. 163). The data provided significant levels of validation for that statement.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided a literature review and much of that material has supported this analysis. The review chapter tabled and was supported by a heuristic model that underpinned and organised the choice of literature. Having that model has provided assistance for this chapter because data and literature have been combined here to generate a coherent picture around participant perceptions.

Boote and Beile (2005) said of educational literature reviews that the task of critically synthesising the relevant information was more difficult when the material was "highly fragmented empirically, conceptually, or ideologically" (p. 3). Given that literature to help examine research questions about the drivers and impediments to site-based innovation was always likely to be complex, fragmented, sometimes empirical, and even ideological in nature, it proved useful (albeit at times difficult) to look broadly at the information available then refine and focus it towards obtaining meaning from the principals' perceptions. This needed to be undertaken with this study's research questions and goals in mind.

For the study as a whole literature was only one source of support. Other sources included the participating principals themselves who so willingly contributed to the data and offered their support for the project; the resources used to obtain the data, from vehicles to recorders; and, the experienced advice of my professorial supervisors. As researcher, having significant background in the field and credibility as a senior educator in NSW were also helpful in progressing the project.

This research journey has involved the researcher as much as it has involved the participants. Kuhn (2000) said:

There would seem few more important accomplishments than people becoming aware of and reflective about their own thinking and able to monitor and manage

the ways in which it is influenced by external sources, in academic, work, and personal life settings. (p. 181)

On a number of occasions and for a number of participants, it was indicated to me that they found their involvement in this research stimulating and enjoyable. PT said that in his view, principals so rarely had the opportunity to speak in depth about the problems and successes of their professional lives. For a researcher, the practical outcome of becoming aware of and reflective about their own thinking during a research effort was writing about that awareness; writing about all the interrelated facets of the research that had been undertaken (Creswell, 2008).

The writing of this thesis has been designed to provide the reader with steadily increasing depth of understanding about the matters raised by the participants, finally moving to analysing the data and applying perspective to it using relevant literature. The following chapter draws on the study as a whole to suggest possible ways forward—possible strategies to increase principals' capacity to lead their schools in innovative ways.

Chapter 8

Possible Ways Forward

It is preferable to conceptualise reform as a spiral, rather than as a linear,

process. This leaves time and conceptual space for ongoing reflection, critical

questioning, and reconsidering initial assumptions.

Hughes and Brock (2008, p. 193)

Introduction

In this study I posited that the principalship was a key agent of innovation and

reform in education. The aim was to advance scholarly understanding of real-world

effectiveness for school leaders trying reform and innovate. The data came directly from

the perceptions of experienced, practicing principals. In broad terms, this study sought

to increase understanding of "real-world" school, system, and principal effectiveness.

Certainly, the evidence that was gathered during 2016 from principals provided

clear evidence that the participants saw innovative practice at their sites as a highly

desirable goal. However complex the problems, whatever their perceptions of the

constraints, reform and innovation was something they wanted to achieve and they saw themselves as a crucial element of such endeavours.

Stemming from a position that accepted increased SBM as positive and desirable, the participants discussed those drivers that they believed were helpful to school reform and innovation and the impediments that they believed were not. This study's evidence indicated that the principals were not working in isolation from the system, government, or community. Their leadership was culturally and operationally embedded in these broader contexts. They discussed a broad array of external influences that impacted their capacity to achieve innovation in their schools. Consequently, the ways forward suggested in this chapter must span the totality of those influences.

My participants noted that from a school's point of view, to be able to innovate for context within a large system's broad policy framework, a school leader had to have the authority to make significant decisions, including decisions about resources such as staff and finance. However, SBM that can facilitate innovative practice, they said, transcends just increased control of people and money. There are positive and negative influences at work where "real-world" change is required. There will also be both theoretical and practical (some participants said pragmatic) considerations for principals who are trying to innovate. Further, there will be evidentiary and data based factors not just in knowing *wha*t to attempt but also, in *evaluating* those improvement programs that are being attempted.

In understanding these major pressures for change that the participants have said they were experiencing, it becomes important to know whether SBM had changed not just their leadership practice but also, whether any local leadership changes were interacting with policies and procedures that may be occurring at system level.

In providing this discourse on the possible ways forward, I recognise the limitations of my study, including those of methodology, sample size, and timeframe. This was a multiple case study, qualitative investigation involving only eight secondary principals, with data collected in three phases of interview, all within a single calendar year. The study's methodology however, enabled me to engage in detail with the perspectives of practicing principals as they operated in real contexts. In this way, the data gathered was based on "mediated activity." The participants put forward detailed ideas and engaged with complex conceptualisations of what they saw as assisting or deterring achievement of a more efficient, more productive, more innovative, and more successful school with particular reference to SBM. Each principal contributed on average about 2.8 hours of focussed, thoughtful, expert, provocative content.

The interviews were spaced over 10 months from February to November in 2016. The interview protocols developed for Phases 2 and 3 were built from participant responses to Phase 1. They included general questions put to all eight principals and specific questions put to individual principals that "followed up" on one or more of their particularly interesting ideas. The aim of this "gateway" approach was to deepen understanding and explanation of participant ideas and concepts, while simultaneously revealing more about individual principal's attitudes. The interview questions presented to the participating principals related to their professional environment—the contexts in which they endeavoured to increase their "real" level of SBM in order to obtain greater and/or improved innovation at their sites.

My data shows that the participating principals all perceived issues and concerns with the current SBM policy in NSW although the depth of their concern varied from principal to principal. I conjecture that some of the concerns they raised may also be concerns for many other principals in NSW and if so, the matters that have emerged in

this research would be worthy of deeper consideration not just by other researchers, but by educators and policy makers in NSW and elsewhere. Further research would increase confidence about my findings and extend the veracity of the possible ways forward suggested in this chapter. More research is needed that encompasses larger samples of principals and/or school leadership groups. This includes replications of the current study with different participants or other types of schools (perhaps primary schools), using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to add depth of coverage and additional insights.

If possible, further research should be undertaken in jurisdictions and schools that are both similar and dissimilar to NSW secondary schools. Inter alia, such research might include explorations that ultimately assist our understanding of matters relating to how the complexities and interactions between system, principals and school contexts assist or deter innovative practice in schools.

Notwithstanding the call for further research, I contend that what has been found in the current study was of sufficient clarity and importance to warrant suggesting some possible ways forward about the matters that have come to light. I contend that these possible ways forward would be strengthened by being enacted concomitantly with further research. Six possible ways forward are included in later sections of this chapter under the heading *Key findings and some strategies for achieving cultural change*. The data also pointed to two broadly related matters that arose in the study and are briefly discussed under the heading *Matters in need of further clarification.* These matters formed as a natural extension of meaningful consideration of the data. Exploring them may be a first step in greater understanding of what appears to be some of the key impediments this research has highlighted in respect of real-world principal

effectiveness, they are, concerns about trust, accountability and the effective sharing of authority.

The Need for Measured Solutions

The purpose of this section is to draw "real-world" implications and possible future directions that faithfully represent the research findings. The findings reveal not just the challenges and negative sentiments of participants but also how they believed these issues could be addressed and improved over time. There was an embedded sense of optimism and positive messages for the system that could be gleaned from a number of participant responses. This included recognising the quality of work and support that principals received from a number of DoE policy and support units and specific DoE personnel (several such people were identified in the data but cannot be named of course) as exemplary and truly positive drivers for change. There was unanimous agreement amongst the participants about the value of being a part of the NSW public education system; that effective, properly resourced public education was a crucial element of a sustainable society. There was also a view that principal development was a matter that needed reframing in order for the next generation of principals to be effective in an increasingly complex environment; to have the right skills and understandings and to be ready to achieve their accountabilities.

The views expressed by seven of the participants about their organisation (the DoE) and its systems of operation were prevailingly negative. However, the participating principals were at pains to recognise what they saw as the strengths and to offer views about processes for improvement.

The approach taken to establish the possible ways forward presented in this chapter was not predicated on some shallowly thought out demolition of a large

system's accountability mechanisms; nor was it predicated on upending reasonable checks and balances or the need for suitable metrics to allow prudent governance for either a system or an individual school. It was not about a view that democratically elected governments should not intervene where necessary; not without cognisance that busy, stressed school leaders might on occasion feel disaffected. Nor was it about possible ways forward supported by an underlying paradigm of principal infallibility.

An important question that arises from this study is whether (and how) the NSW public education system might achieve a future position where the positive drivers for improvement and innovation at school level outweigh the impediments. This question assumes that the indications from the data have sufficient generality and substance to support such inquiry and, if so, it becomes a question that should underpin any possible ways forward. This study's evidence overwhelmingly indicates that multiple, incoherent reform agendas and unrealistic timeframes strongly militate against effective SBM and site-based innovation. The participants strongly advocated for less bureaucratic interference, more trust, and system policies and government interventions that respected the role of principals. They were adamant that reform of this kind must be predicated on deeper and more sensitive understanding of how change actually works in schools. School-level planning needed to take place in an environment of certainty and schools could find greater success if there was genuine system level support for the implementation of their plans. More broadly, the participating principals identified the urgency for cultural change and the pressing need to plan and establish timetables for such change.

The need for cultural change was, at the time of writing, also of concern to the NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, but on a much broader stage, that of Federal/State relationships. The Premier of NSW leads the government that oversees the DoE through

the Education Minister. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that at her next Australian National Press Club speech of 2017 that she would ask the Commonwealth Government to "step back and give high performing states such as NSW more autonomy" and she would continue, asking for "fewer agreements, fewer points of contact between the two levels of government, less red tape, less prescriptive agreements, less overlap and more trust" (Nicholls, 2017, p. 9). These statements from the Premier seem to strongly contemporise my participants' comments and concerns about the need for changes in the culture, procedures, relationships, processes, and authority settings within the NSW DoE.

There are no absolutes about the sensible and useful ways forward for such a complex system as that encapsulated in the DEC; rather, progress is likely to be about finding new, more sensitive, better balanced, more coherent, and inclusive pathways for reform. The possible ways forward presented in this chapter are in essence arguments for cultural change. The participating principals held strong beliefs about quality education as a mechanism for achieving social justice and future prosperity for their students and the society. Values and beliefs of this kind featured strongly in their raison d'être and underpinned their planning and reform efforts.

There was no suggestion from participants that reform would be anything but difficult and iterative, a view strongly supported by contemporary academic literature. For example, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) cautioned that secondary schools had proven especially impervious to change. Nevertheless, I believe that increased innovation could be engineered within the current NSW system with appropriately focussed and measured strategies for change. Whatever the approaches taken, they cannot be insular and simplistic, nor exclusively "bottom up" or "top down." A subtext from the data was that successful change to overcome the participants' concerns should

be consultative and transparent in its development. In keeping with Fullan's concerns about "allness," an argument could be made that any reforms aimed at cultural improvement should work across the whole organisation but, at the same time, develop deeper understanding and appreciation of the value of principal leadership and the impact of local school context. A key message from the data was that truly understanding the matters that assist and impede principals in the leadership of their schools had the potential to support whole-system reform and, very importantly, the type of deep and pervasive cultural change sustainable across the whole organisation.

All of the participants discussed the issue of resources, how valuable it could be to have increased resources and/or to have more control over them. They viewed securing resources and controlling resourcing issues as being a crucial part of successful management of reforms. However, there was nothing in this study's evidence to suggest that many effective school-level reforms could not be undertaken within existing resources. That is, that resourcing was never implicated as the salient or sole barrier. Participants indicted that changes were required in procedural and attitudinal matters. The data implied that such matters are not greatly dependent on substantially increasing resource levels within a school. However, the participants did indicate that implementing school-based innovation required at least a reasonable level of resourcing and, very importantly, that flexibility in resource use at school level was an issue that needed to be addressed.

Key Findings and Strategies for
Achieving Cultural Change

In broad summary, participants considered that the system's culture, its overly controlling ethos, its policies, procedures and processes, had generated a "ceiling" limiting their real-world effectiveness.

This research was based on eight case studies, eight different schools, and eight different principals; nevertheless, there were often remarkable similarities in participant responses to the interview questions. This work did not shy away from context, complexity, or the personally felt concerns (and successes) of the participating principals. Nor did it shy away from trying to understand the many factors affecting change that they raised, factors that for better or worse impacted their leadership and their efforts to reform and innovate in their schools.

The following section identifies some key findings in the interests of achieving reform. These findings are essentially practical arguments, strategies for achieving cultural change that involve schools, principals, and the system. This is consistent with the theoretical framework for this study, which posited that there were a number of criteria centred on leadership effectiveness that could impact cultural change in schools and in the system. Taking the participant responses in Chapters 4 to 6 holistically, it would be hard to discount the need for strategies that could improve important elements that make up DEC's culture, and through such strategies, potentially assist individual principals to improve their *school's* culture. Underpinning any such strategies for cultural reform, we should not forget PW's assertion that "they [the system] don't really understand how complex it all becomes at the school implementation level," nor PZ's comment that "a lot of the shape of the principal role, I think, is going to be determined by things that are beyond the school and beyond the principal in terms of the things that

they can influence." The possible ways forward set out below are supported by a paragraph or two that considers that suggested strategy's relationship to the study's key findings.

"Unhandcuff" SBM by Re-organising Policy

> *The system needs to review its policy requirements with the particular aim of reducing the number and effect of those system policies (and sometimes government initiatives) that make genuine SBM difficult. Policy development going forward should be mindful of school-level implementation impediments by providing for differences in school context and carefully considering the consistency, clarity of purpose and effective dissemination of policy. The quantum, scope, frequency, synchronicity, alignment and complexity of all system reforms also requires more consideration and control.*

However hard participating principals tried to build a positive, results-oriented, contextually appropriate culture for their schools, there were significant impeding forces—forces mostly external to their schools—that made this task far more difficult than it might otherwise have been. Participating principals noted that problems of this kind seemed to increase as the system generated ever more "top-down" reforms. Principals and schools were overloaded with centrally mandated, "one-size-fits-all" policy reforms that diverted energy and resources away from school-based initiatives. Perhaps a way to generalise from the data relating to these matters could be to look at the current situation in NSW public education as a system living within a "counterproductive bubble," a system trying to find ways to improve schooling outcomes through increased accountability, strict compliance, centralised control, and an ever increasing number of mandated reforms and policies. The evidence indicated

that the more the system sought to control and mandate the reform agenda, the more that principals "pushed back." The most cogent example of this was the LSLD policy being undermined by what the participants saw as the system's prioritisation of control and political expediency over sustainable reform.

Improve Planning and Leadership Certainty

Summarily, school-based planning is treated as subordinate to planning at higher system levels, manifesting in uncertainty, indecision and misdirection of scarce resources in schools. A super-ordinate planning is required that sets out agreed policy and procedures at organisational levels above the school (system, region, and area) and provides clear parameters and commitments around how planning at higher levels in the system and government relate to schools and their local planning prerogatives.

The intention is that once school-level plans are completed within agreed frameworks, principals can proceed with confidence and without disruption to implement them. The evidence of my participants shows that even detailed school plans were often not given due acknowledgment, undervalued or overridden by ad hoc centralist policy and system reforms mandated from above. My participants found themselves struggling to manage in a sea of uncertainty and ambiguity. Two of them specifically referred to the reduction in community respect for their leadership when local plans that had been devised, accepted and at times even resourced by their communities, were overridden by system or government priorities that did not reflect local needs.

Get Accountability Right

Accountability requirements should be broadly and mutually agreed, integrated with school- and system-level planning, sensitive to the diversity in local school contexts, and focused on both student attainment metrics and broader educational outcomes. The purposes and processes for gathering data, both within a school and external to a school, require clarification and review to provide increased certainty about how accountability relates to performance, and to improve the quality and assuredness of data capable of driving innovation.

The principals fully accepted the need for accountability; they wanted useful measures of student performance, they strongly believed in the value of data, but they also believed that the NSW accountability systems evidenced inadequate planning and were shallow in their scope, narrow in their choice of measures, and inappropriately calibrated for use in many school contexts. They expressed concern that the system poorly understood how change actually worked in schools, in spite of its best intentions. Consequently, the system's accountability measures were frequently seen as potentially misleading, lacking in coherence and incongruous with the intended purpose—issues exacerbated by the limited capacity and competence system officers working external to schools.

Value, Respect, and Support Principal Leadership

The efficacy of SBM to further student outcomes is critically contingent on having clarity about and support for the role and authority of school principals. Actions in this space have the potential to improve trust and reduce feelings of "us and them" currently pervading the system and its schools.

In my study, principals perceived that they were not trusted by the system, reflected in the lack of clarity about their designated authority levels and roles. The quality of professional relationships and respect for those leading schools are integral to designing system improvements and innovative practice. My participants implicated a prevailing and destructive "us and them" undercurrent in school and system relationships. Principal effectiveness was seen as under acute threat from poorly coordinated support structures, inadequate management processes, poor organisational linkages, and the apparent unwillingness of the system to genuinely recognise the importance of context. The system's "one-size-fits-all" mentality caused constant difficulties. A principal's success, my participants said, relied on their leadership capacity, their experience, detailed knowledge of their context, their ability to "manage" the external environment, and a determination to pursue the values and purposes *they* believed really mattered. Coherence across the system was lacking in any meaningful way leading to frustration, reduced performance, and excessive principal workloads.

Re-think Principal Preparation and Development

> *To enhance the effectiveness of aspiring and newly appointed principals, a more practical, pragmatic, and mentor-based development process should be devised. A personalised, iterative process is envisaged; a process where principals consistently engage with and are directly supported by, effective, experienced colleagues; a process that includes practical use of educational theory and research; a process that is underpinned by a paradigm of real-world effectiveness.*

My data indicated that current system ideas about principal preparation and development did not allow for the many contradictory and often ambiguous forces that

principals experienced and had to manage in their efforts to progress their schools past

mediocrity. Participants expressed concern that principals less experienced than

themselves would be overwhelmed by the current pace and extent of reform, by the

ambiguities of system planning and policy, and the increasingly centralist nature of the

system's operations. Grounded, pragmatic approaches to principal preparation and

development could include: ongoing mentoring, encouragement for new principals to

identify the skills they need in order to build cultures that suit their context and, detailed

information about how schools actually operate on a daily basis, including how to deal

effectively with the impediments and useful drivers that they will likely experience.

SBM as a Vital Part of a Coherent Whole

SBM is more than just another policy that requires implementation. This study

could legitimately posit that the problems raised by participants concerning

SBM transcend any simple notion of policy. Fundamentally, the capability of

SBM to lift the real-world effectiveness of school principals is contingent upon a

system and its schools achieving broadly-based cultural change. Securing

improved organisational connectivity and increased respect for school leaders

need to be foremost among the system's goals.

I want to briefly consider these suggested ways forward with respect to their

links to supporting innovation at the school level. The "summary" way forward

immediately above points to the notion that the capability of SBM to lift real-world

effectiveness of principals requires significant cultural change. As previously explained,

the relationship between SBM and actually obtaining innovation in a functioning school

is a close but complex one. In a multitude of ways, with a multitude of examples, the

participants pointed to the problem of a system culture that while not overtly toxic, was

a culture that impeded their efforts at obtaining change. Without change, innovation

cannot be achieved but not all change is innovative; change and innovation are not

interchangeable terms. Change can be useful or otherwise, change can be inventive, but

as Beswick et al. (2015) definition discussed, while change can make something new or

different innovation seeks to create lasting synergies and solutions (p. 5).

Matters in Need of Further Clarification

At its conclusion, this thesis points to important questions and matters in need of

clarification that I believe should be considered as a matter of priority in the interests of

improvements for innovation, reform and possibly, student outcomes. These questions

relate to my data and have explicit applicability to the NSW public education system. I

contend that they also have applicability to other sectors and jurisdictions in Australia

and overseas.

How do we maintain appropriate standards while ensuring that SBM works towards best possible student outcomes in every school?

To decide whether that is possible will require wide-ranging, significant

evaluation and research, and a change of attitude by many people (at least within NSW

DoE). A positive first step requires acknowledgement that the system's "one-size-fits-

all" policy and the discounting of specific schooling context inherent in blanketed

agendas of this kind are major factors impeding the efforts of schools to liberate local

reform potential. These matters featured strongly among my participant's perceptions.

Can a true sharing of power develop between principals and the system? What would be the conditions under which all levels of an education system would strive towards

sharing power and responsibility? How can the "us and them" perceptions among principals and the system be mitigated?

In my study, participants pointed to the need to clarify authority permissions and subsidiarity settings because of their potential to influence resourcing, leadership effectiveness and ultimately, student outcomes. The most telling evidence was that participants saw SBM as operationally "handcuffed" by the very system that instigated the policy to reform and (supposedly) empower school leaders.

The current study canvassed the drivers and impediments that participants saw as affecting their ability to reform and innovate in their schools. My participants were clearly of the view that there were deep disconnects between their beliefs, purposes and actions as principals, and the beliefs, purposes, and actions of many of those in the "siloed" bureaucracy external to their schools. This resulted in compromised leadership effectiveness in schools. More specifically, they said that the system's policies and overall ethos of centralised control, compounded by adhocracy and predilection to focus on issues of the moment, continually overshadowed the need for sustainable, contextually based solutions to real world issues. This manifested itself in the tension between unwanted dependency and autonomy at the school level. There was little sharing of purpose, little agreement as to what real school and student success looked like, and almost no allowance for particular school and community circumstances. At an even deeper level, there was limited respect by the system or government for principal skill and professionalism. My participants frequently pointed to the costly waste of the system's "siloed" support units and the alienation of these from the reality of the schools they supposedly serve. Trust of the system by participants was clearly in short supply.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, SBM was high on the policy agenda for NSW public schools as it is in other jurisdictions throughout the world. The DEC's Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD) initiative, used as a case-in-point example in this thesis, was designed to provide principals with additional local flexibility and decision-making authority. However, the eight experienced secondary principals I interviewed on multiple occasions in this study identified significant issues and impediments affecting SBM in their schools. The LSLD policy, while intended to provide a measure of principal autonomy, at the time of data collection, was not achieving this in practice. Further, my participants considered their local authority to be insufficient and its nature and scope insufficiently defined and understood, to allow genuinely sustainable school-based innovation. To them this was a significant factor putting the success of the DoE's SBM policy in jeopardy in terms of its capacity to underpin innovation that focused on local needs.

Based on the evidence of my study and that of leading scholars in the field, it could be argued that achieving effective SBM will require greater policy coherence and system-wide cultural change that is built on mutual respect and clarity of purpose across all levels of the system. Actions in this space, according to my participants, should include a deeper understanding of change processes and in particular, how they operate in functioning schools, and an acceptance of shared responsibility for ensuring that sustainable change is achievable. There was belief amongst the participants that government and system goals such as increases in effective innovative practice and lifts in student achievement metrics were conceivably achievable. However, countering those views, was pessimism that securing achievements of this kind would not be without angst for school personnel, particularly for school leaders, and would not

happen for some time to come as a result, inter alia, of the NSW DoE's current policy settings.

A range of disparate factors were perceived by my participants to impinge on leadership and school-based innovation. At the school operations level, change was recognised as extraordinarily complex and the forces affecting it, highly interdependent and often frustratingly outside the influence of principals. Many of the impediments identified in this study clearly concerned what Fullan (2011) referred as the "wrong" types of drivers to secure whole system reform. Participants pointed to narrow accountability mechanisms, fragmented and unrealistic policy, poorly designed subsidiarity settings, too much reform, myopic change agendas, an excess of "top-down" decision making, unnecessary bureaucratic intervention in schools, and a lack of coherent support for principals. They posited that these issues predominated in the current corporate culture and weighed heavily on the participants' motivation and professional identities. There was clear evidence that too few of the "right" types of drivers were well enough understood or implemented within the system. These included the centrality of building leadership capacity, the development of a holistic, locally respectful change mindset, and programs that encouraged intrinsic motivation and teamwork.

My participants saw the DoE as locked in what they saw as a seemingly endless series of "one-size-fits-all" policy mandates that ignored the specific contexts in which principals operated. This seemed to them as counter to a view that SBM should enable genuine increases in local effectiveness. Measures of school performance were shallowly conceived by the system as were the notions underpinning existing accountability systems. The participating principals saw little in the current policy milieu that acknowledged the importance of their leadership or of what was being

achieved in individual schools; nor was there understanding or recognition, they said, of how those successes were being obtained.

The resounding call from the participants was for genuine reform of the broad cultural type that allowed for increased local authority and appropriate localised action, action based within an atmosphere of trust and not fettered by inappropriate regulation such as multiple audits, extensive compliance reporting, asset management constraints and poorly designed finance and information management systems. In terms of understanding what innovation means to my participants, it became clear that their view was pragmatically supportive of Beswick et al. (2015) definition of innovation; that *innovation seeks to create lasting synergies and solutions* (p. 5).

As it stood, the participating principals saw themselves as "marooned in the middle," besieged in their struggle to achieve local needs and expectations; endlessly managing an unsupportive system above and challenging staff, student and community concerns below. The system to them was vigorously intent on imposing its own broad-brush policies and initiatives and, in doing so, sapping local leadership energy and diverting resources away from much needed school-based innovations. The participants clearly indicated that the goal of running a genuinely innovative and successful school was far more complex and contextually situated than many senior officers and politicians seemed willing to acknowledge or capable of understanding.

Perhaps the most reassuring part of my study was that, at least for the experienced principals I interviewed, there were sustainable innovations underway in their schools, students and teachers were (mostly) succeeding, and constant self-evaluation was leading to broadly better outcomes right across the range of their schools' endeavours. Notwithstanding these successes, my participants indicated that appropriate system reforms would see SBM, not just as yet another reform policy, but

as a crucial pathway allowing more effective processes enabling innovative practice at their schools. Participants indicted that if the system could prioritise the value of principal leadership that was effective in context, and pursued the right system drivers to generate holistic reform, there was genuine scope for improvement of site-based innovation in NSW.

As PZ so succinctly put it: "a lot of the shape of the principal role, I think, is going to be determined by things that are beyond the school and beyond the principal in terms of [what] they can influence." The implication for system leaders and policy makers everywhere is the need to elevate principals, and the pivotal role they play as school leaders, in school based reform efforts. I trust that the findings of my study, a case in point, could be of use to other sectors and other jurisdictions, whether they be in Australia or elsewhere.

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Appendices

Appendix A
First Interview Question Protocol

Term 1, 2016

School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation

After Rubin & Rubin (2005), Chapter 6 – *The Responsive Interview as an Extended Conversation* and Yin (2009), Chapter 4 – *Collecting Case Study Evidence.*

Please note that the additional questions in italics are there only as <u>possible</u> prompts to support a given question and/or to provide some guidance if necessary during conversation.

Professor Max Smith, Professor John Fischetti, Mr. Maurice Brunning

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. I'd like to remind you that you can stop this particular interview or indeed withdraw from the study at any time without it affecting you and that all steps have been taken to ensure your anonymity. As we discussed, this interview is about your **perceptions**, the perceptions of a practicing principal about what is going on in your professional environment during a period of innovation. I'll start the digital recorder now. Could you say your first name for me please?

Q1: What are your perceptions of the current drivers or impediments to change as you go about leading your school in an environment of increasing school based management?

What do you see as the key matters that help or hinder your ability to enact change in your particular context?

Q2: What theoretical and practical approaches are you using to design, implement and maintain innovations in your school? Could you describe the innovation you currently see as most important at your school.

Do you see the increases in the ability to manage locally as a driver or an impediment in helping you achieve sustainable innovations here?

OR

Do you think you have changed how you go about innovation in your school as a result of increasing SBM?

Q3: How do you use evidence, what data sources and what educational theories are you using, to identify, monitor and evaluate your efforts to make the changes you require?

Do you think the SBM environment assists in this matter?

Q4: Some people say that to really succeed in improving schooling outcomes you need local, district and system reforms all working together to provide the best environment for change; Michael Fullan calls this idea tri-level reform. For the innovation(s) here at your school, do you feel that the district initiatives and the system initiatives are drivers or impediments to you sustaining innovation?

What's your perception about whether there is tri-level reform present in your innovation environment? If so, how is that working?

Q5: Have you changed or modified your leadership practice because of the increasing

SBM environment or because of the drivers and impediments you have described?

Do you see particular leadership attributes as suiting particular reform contexts?

Thank you for giving me your valuable time. I know firsthand how busy and complex

the principal's role can be. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with you. Again

I'd like to emphasize the approaches we have taken to ensure confidentiality and your

privacy. Do you have any questions at this time?

Appendix B

Second Interview Question Protocol

Term 3, 2016

School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation

Please note that the additional sub-questions in italics are intended as possible prompts to support the main question and may not be used in all circumstances.

Professor Max Smith, Professor John Fischetti, Mr. Maurice Brunning

Preamble: Thank you for continuing to take part in this research. I'd like to remind you that you can stop this particular interview or indeed withdraw from the study at any time and that all steps have been taken to ensure your anonymity. As we discussed, this interview is about your perceptions, the perceptions of a practicing principal about what is going on in your professional environment during a period of innovation and change.

This interview follows our meeting in first term and the questions below build on ideas and themes that were raised by principals in the study at that time. Questions 5 & 6 relate only to *your* particular perceptions from term 1 extending if possible, one or more of the ideas that you raised at that time. If this is of any concern to you please let me know now.

I'll start the digital recorder:

Q1: Given your experiences with SBM, to what extent has the initiative been a success or failure?

What do you see as the matters that help or hinder your ability to enact change with specific reference to system initiatives, accountabilities and policy settings and perhaps supervisory structures?

Q2: How highly do you rate subsidiarity (community control, or, perhaps "localness" of the school) as a concept in modern education? Is there a relationship, probably complex, between subsidiarity and increasing SBM? In terms of the innovation/s at your school we talked about last time, has SBM made any difference to its *progress*?

Q3: Could you please comment on what you perceive as the external constraints on school based innovation and particularly comment upon your capacity as principal to respond to these, to build a *culture* suiting innovation?

Do you see particular leadership attributes as suiting particular reform contexts?

Do you think your leadership and the SBM environment mutually shape each other?

Q4: Could you please comment on the issue of coherent practice in the Department; how the processes, linkages, relationships and information management systems help or hinder innovative practice.

In terms of these matters, what might be the drivers or impediments that support your local context?

Questions 5 and 6 are designed to provide a direct extension of your comments during the first term interview. Please forgive and correct me if I have in any way misconstrued your ideas!

For Principal V only:

Q5: Last time you commented on the great importance of senior leadership in a school in terms of innovative practice and that the senior leadership was a driver of change and you related this to "your very local job" of school improvement in a competitive environment. Could you enlarge on these matters with respect to competitiveness and equity; how these matters relate to leadership and obtaining innovation?

Q6: Also, you discussed "legitimate autonomy" and related to this to legitimate consequences for action and set out that there will not be genuine reform with the current milieu of drivers and impediments - examples you gave were salary and principal education levels. Could you go a little deeper into these matters please?

Thank you for giving me your valuable time. I know firsthand how busy and complex the principal's role can be. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with you. Again I'd like to emphasize the approaches we have taken to ensure confidentiality and your privacy. Do you have any questions at this time?

Appendix C

Third Interview Question Protocol

Term 4, 2016 – Recorded Telephone Interviews

School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based

Innovation

Professor Max Smith, Professor John Fischetti, Mr. Maurice Brunning

Preamble: Thank you for continuing to take part in this research. I'd like to remind you that you can stop this particular telephone interview or indeed withdraw from the study at any time and that all steps have been taken to ensure your anonymity. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of this interview. This interview continues to be about your perceptions, the perceptions of a practicing principal about what is going on in your professional environment during a period of innovation and change.

This interview follows our meeting in August and the questions seek to find thoughtful pathways to obtain clarification of ideas and themes that were raised by principals in the study at that time. In attempting this, the questions relate to important contemporary Government/System initiatives that have recently been announced or are being discussed and are relevant to the research.

If any matter relating to this research is of any concern to you, please let me know now.

I'll start the digital recorder:

Q1: BOSTES is going to be renamed the NSW Education Standards Authority (ESA). It was described in the SMH of 20 August 2016 (p5) as "a new, beefed up,

independent education authority that will have power to close non-compliant schools and conduct random unannounced inspections……." According to the same SMH article, the NSW Education Minister, Mr. Adrian Piccoli, talked about this new authority "making schools and teachers nervous." How do you see this initiative interacting with SBM and efforts to increase site-based innovative practice? What do you consider is the motivation for this change?

Q2: Can you please comment on what you perceive as your level of authority for site-based decisions in the current NSW SBM environment? Within your comment, could you include discussion of how such authority (or lack of authority) could extend to decisions and positions that relate to moral concerns, or conflicted situations?

Q3: In an opinion piece on August 29, 2016 about the appointment of the new NSW Education Department Secretary, Mr. Mark Scott, the SMH stated "the education system remains creaky and bureaucratic, full of anachronistic work practices. Mr Scott will need to chip away at that entrenched culture to ensure the Department and our schools better reflect modern workplace orthodoxy, to give our students the best chance at success." If it is desirable to have site-based innovation, what actions should a new Secretary be undertaking? In respect of this, does the SMH opinion hold water?

Thank you in all sincerity, from the University and John, Max and myself for your valuable contributions to this study. Few principal practitioners could engage with the matters that we have discussed with the depth, honesty and alacrity that you have

shown during our discussions this year. It has been a pleasure working with you and at completion, I look forward to sharing the outcomes of this study with you if that is your wish.

Appendix D

Human Research Ethics Approvals

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Notification of Expedited Approval

To Chief Investigator or Project Supervisor:	**Professor Max Smith**
Cc Co-investigators / Research Students:	**Professor John Fischetti** **Mr Maurice Brunning**
Re Protocol:	**School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation**
Date:	**17-Dec-2015**
Reference No:	**H-2015-0398**
Date of Initial Approval:	**17-Dec-2015**

Thank you for your **Response to Conditional Approval** submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) seeking approval in relation to the above protocol.

Your submission was considered under **Expedited** review by the Chair/Deputy Chair.

I am pleased to advise that the decision on your submission is **Approved** effective **17-Dec-2015**.

In approving this protocol, the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is of the opinion that the project complies with the provisions contained in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007, and the requirements within this University relating to human research.

Approval will remain valid subject to the submission, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. *If the approval of an External HREC has been "noted" the approval period is as determined by that HREC.*

The full Committee will be asked to ratify this decision at its next scheduled meeting. A formal *Certificate of Approval* will be available upon request. Your approval number is **H-2015-0398**.

If the research requires the use of an Information Statement, ensure this number is inserted at the relevant point in the Complaints paragraph prior to distribution to potential participants You

may then proceed with the research.

Conditions of Approval

This approval has been granted subject to you complying with the requirements for *Monitoring of Progress*, *Reporting of Adverse Events*, and *Variations to the Approved Protocol* as <u>detailed below</u>.

PLEASE NOTE:
In the case where the HREC has "noted" the approval of an External HREC, progress reports and reports of adverse events are to be submitted to the External HREC only. In the case of Variations to the approved protocol, or a Renewal of approval, you will apply to the External HREC for approval in the first instance and then Register that approval with the University's HREC.

- *Monitoring of Progress*

Other than above, the University is obliged to monitor the progress of research projects involving human participants to ensure that they are conducted according to the protocol as approved by the HREC. A progress report is required on an annual basis. Continuation of your HREC approval for this project is conditional upon receipt, and satisfactory assessment, of annual progress reports. You will be advised when a report is due.

- *Reporting of Adverse Events*

1. It is the responsibility of the person **first named on this Approval Advice** to report adverse events.

2. Adverse events, however minor, must be recorded by the investigator as observed by the investigator or as volunteered by a participant in the research. Full details are to be documented, whether or not the investigator, or his/her deputies, consider the event to be related to the research substance or procedure.

3. Serious or unforeseen adverse events that occur during the research or within six (6) months of completion of the research, must be reported by the person first named on the Approval Advice to the (HREC) by way of the Adverse Event Report form (via RIMS at https://rims.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp) within 72 hours of the occurrence of the event or the investigator receiving advice of the event.

4. Serious adverse events are defined as:

   o Causing death, life threatening or serious disability.

   o Causing or prolonging hospitalisation.

   o Overdoses, cancers, congenital abnormalities, tissue damage, whether or not they are judged to be caused by the investigational agent or procedure.

- Causing psycho-social and/or financial harm. This covers everything from perceived invasion of privacy, breach of confidentiality, or the diminution of social reputation, to the creation of psychological fears and trauma.

- Any other event which might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

5. Reports of adverse events must include:

- Participant's study identification number;

- date of birth;

- date of entry into the study;

- treatment arm (if applicable);

- date of event;

- details of event;

- the investigator's opinion as to whether the event is related to the research procedures; and

- action taken in response to the event.

6. Adverse events which do not fall within the definition of serious or unexpected, including those reported from other sites involved in the research, are to be reported in detail at the time of the annual progress report to the HREC.

- ***Variations to approved protocol***

If you wish to change, or deviate from, the approved protocol, you will need to submit an *Application for Variation to Approved Human Research* (via RIMS at https://rims.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp). Variations may include, but are not limited to, changes or additions to investigators, study design, study population, number of participants, methods of recruitment, or participant information/consent documentation. **Variations must be approved by the (HREC) before they are implemented** except when Registering an approval of a variation from an external HREC which has been designated the lead HREC, in which case you may proceed as soon as you receive an acknowledgement of your Registration.

Linkage of ethics approval to a new Grant

HREC approvals cannot be assigned to a new grant or award (ie those that were not identified on the application for ethics approval) without confirmation of the approval from the Human

Research Ethics Officer on behalf of the HREC.

Best wishes for a successful project.

Professor Allyson Holbrook

Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

For communications and enquiries:

Human Research Ethics Administration

Research Services
Research Integrity Unit
The Chancellery
The University of Newcastle
Callaghan NSW 2308
T +61 2 492 17894
F +61 2 492 17164
Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au

RIMS website - https://RIMS.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Progress Report Acknowledgement

To Chief Investigator or Project Supervisor:	**Professor Max Smith**
Cc Co-investigators / Research Students:	**Professor John Fischetti**
	Mr Maurice Brunning
Re Protocol:	**School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and**
	Impediments to Site-Based Innovation
Date:	**23-Jan-2017**
Reference No:	**H-2015-0398**

Thank you for submitting your **Annual Progress Report** to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) in relation to the above protocol.

Your report has been accepted and your HREC approval for the above research remains valid. Continuation of this approval will again be subject to the provision of an annual progress report by the due date approximately one year from now.

The timely submission of your report is greatly appreciated.

Human Research Ethics Administration

Research & Innovation Services
Research Integrity Unit
NIER, Block C
The University of Newcastle
Callaghan NSW 2308
T +61 2 492 17894
Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au

RIMS website - https://RIMS.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Notification of Expedited Approval

To Chief Investigator or Project Supervisor:	**Professor Max Smith**
Cc Co-investigators / Research Students:	**Professor John Fischetti** **Mr Maurice Brunning**
Re Protocol:	**School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation**
Date:	**25-May-2016**
Reference No:	**H-2015-0398**

Thank you for your **Variation** submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) seeking approval in relation to a variation to the above protocol.

Variation to:

1. Revised principal interview schedule.
The revised interview schedule is designed to go deeper to gain more meaningful understanding of the complex nature of school reform. The 2nd round of interviews will take a more nuanced approach with individual principals.

2. Timeline for interviews.
The revised timeline for interviews in 2016 is:
a. Round 1 completed in Term 1, 2016;
b. Round 2 planned for Term 3 in July-August, 2016 including customised for individual principals based on the Round 1 interview responses; and
c. Round 3 planned for October, 2016 as needed on a case-by-case basis.

- Principal Interview Schedule - Term 3: 2nd Interview (v2, dated 20/04/2016)

Your submission was considered under **Expedited** review by the Chair/Deputy Chair.

I am pleased to advise that the decision on your submission is **Approved** effective **25-May-2016**.

The full Committee will be asked to ratify this decision at its next scheduled meeting. A formal *Certificate of Approval* will be available upon request.

Professor Allyson Holbrook
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

For communications and enquiries:
Human Research Ethics Administration

Research Services
Research Integrity Unit
NIER, Block C

The University of Newcastle
Callaghan NSW 2308
T +61 2 492 17894
Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au

RIMS website - https://RIMS.newcastle.edu.au/login.asp

Linked University of Newcastle administered funding:

Funding body	Funding project title	First named investigator	Grant Ref

Appendix E

SERAP (State Education Research Applications Process)

Approvals

Professor Max Smith
University of Newcastle
Callaghan NSW 2308

CORP15/29673
DOC15/938675
SERAP 2015602

Dear Professor Smith

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled *School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. **You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to principals.**

This approval will remain valid until 18-Dec-2016.

As this research does not involve face-to-face contact with children, no researchers or research assistants have been screened to interact with or observe children.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- The privacy of participants is to be protected as per the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.
- All conditions attached to the approval must be complied with.

When your study is completed please email your report to: serap@det.nsw.edu.au
You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Robert Stevens
Manager, Research
18 December 2015

Appendix F

Participant Information Statement

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia

Professor Max Smith
Phone: 49854957
Email: Maxwell.Smith@newcastle.edu.au

Professor John Fischetti
Phone: 49215979
Email: John.Fischetti@newcastle.edu.au

Principals' Information Statement:

School Leaders' Perceptions of the

Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation

Professors Max Smith and John Fischetti	Maurice Brunning
Project Supervisors	Research Student

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is being conducted by Maurice Brunning, a PhD candidate from the School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts at the University of Newcastle.

The research is part of Maurice's studies at the University of Newcastle, jointly supervised by Professor Max Smith and Professor John Fischetti from the School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts, the University of Newcastle. Professors Fischetti and Smith are Head of School and Deputy Head of School respectively and their involvement provides an indication of how important this research is to the University.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand how school leaders perceive and respond to the drivers and impediments of change during what we know is a period of substantial system-level reform. Emphasis will be placed on principals' views and experiences of recent school based management (SBM) policies in public education in NSW and how these relate to community and system demands for sustainable reform, especially improvements in innovative practice. A series of 6 to 8 case study sites will be selected.

The theoretical frame for this research sees the activity of leadership as a series of transactions between the principal as school leader, the system they are part of, general societal context and expectations, and specific school context. One writer put it quite succinctly by saying that the person, the place and the policy context make up a narrative that is woven together over time.

"We did a lot of work in the early 90s to see how principals perceived and responded to the demands of leading their schools but surprisingly little (research) has been done this way in recent years. A lot has changed since then and it is certainly time to go back down the rabbit hole to see how principals are coping with contemporary reform agendas in education." Personal discussion with Sir Michael Barber, Sydney, 22 May 2015.

Who can participate in the research?

The study is seeking a group of 8 *government secondary school principals.*

Consideration in site selection will be given to the following factors:
1. School size – The intention is to include at least one high school with an enrolment of over 900 and one smaller school with an enrolment of less than 500.
2. Location – sites will be drawn from the metropolitan Sydney and provincial Newcastle regions. It may be possible to include one rural high school in the Hunter region.
3. SES – The intention is for the case study sites to service a range of lower, middle and higher, and mixed, socioeconomic status communities.
4. Principal leadership experience and a mixture of sexes.
5. The stage of adoption in terms of SBM and LSLD is also a consideration.

Taken together, this set of factors will capture significant variation in terms of person, place, policy settings, professional practice and more.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this research is entirely a matter of personal choice. Only those people who give their informed consent will be included in the project. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision must not disadvantage you in any way. As you are aware, an email from the lead chief investigator, Professor Max Smith on behalf of the research team, has been sent to NSW secondary principals who might meet the participation criteria inviting them to contact the research team if they would like to participate or have any questions. If you have this document you should have received that email.

If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason and have the option of withdrawing any data which identifies you.

How will your privacy be protected?

Confidentiality will be assured to all participants. All transcripts, notes, printed material and audio recordings will be stored in a lockable cabinet. This cabinet is kept at the researcher's home in Northern Sydney. Names, addresses and other identifying information will be kept in a secured place, but separate to the transcripts. Electronic data will be stored on the chief investigators and the researcher's password protected computers. School identities and the names of participants will be disguised in all research data to provide confidentiality. Collected data will be retained for at least 5 years.

Final consent will be obtained from all participants in writing. Each participant will receive information outlining the study and the confidentiality arrangements with a consent form to be returned to the researcher. Initial phone calls and if required, a preliminary face to face meeting will be undertaken prior to any data collection so that participants can ask about anything they are interested in or concerned about prior to any data collection.

NSW Department of Education approval (SERAP approval # 2015602) has been obtained for this study. Also, as a matter of courtesy, the NSW SPC President has been informed that this research is being undertaken with a small group of NSW DEC Secondary Principals.

Participants will be given opportunities to hear the recordings and/or read the transcripts following the interviews. With participant's permission, interviews will be digitally recorded. These recordings will be transcribed by *Digital Transcripts*. The company's policy states; "all work is treated as confidential and staff are required to sign confidentiality agreements."

What would you be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in semi-structured in-depth interviews of about 50 minutes duration once a term over 3 or 4 terms. This process may need minor adjustment to optimise for participant personal circumstances (eg, principal leave periods or illness). Brief clarifications may be sought from you by telephone outside the once a term interview in some cases and only if strictly necessary. All attempts would be made to reduce any disruption to busy principals' schedules.

None of the data need actually be collected in schools. Interviews could take place at any venue of the participant's choosing (including a school). Participants will be provided with a copy of the questions a week prior to the first interview.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

There are no known risks from participating in this research. The researcher cannot promise you, your teachers or students (or the DEC or SPC) any immediate/direct benefits from participating in this research. However, the results of this research will contribute to building the knowledge and perhaps, the policy base, for both the DEC and the SPC as well as contribute to national and international discourse about the drivers and impediments to site-based innovation.

How will the information collected be used?

The data will be reported and presented in a thesis to be submitted for Maurice's PhD degree. Parts of the findings may also be reported by the researcher and/or his supervisors at academic conferences and in scholarly papers. Individual participants will not be identified in any reports arising from the project. You will personally receive a summary of the findings if you would like to have it provided (see consent form). Individual participants or schools will not be identified. Non-identifiable data may be shared with other parties to encourage scientific scrutiny, and to contribute to further research and public knowledge, or as required by law.

What do you need to do to participate?

Please read this Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, feel free to contact the researcher Maurice Brunning and/or his principal supervisor, Professor Max Smith.

If you would like to participate in this research please complete the attached Consent Form and return it to the researcher as explained above.

Further information
If you would like further information please contact Maurice Brunning by email: maurice.brunning@uon.edu.au.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Professor Maxwell Smith
Project Supervisor

Professor John Fischetti
Project Co-Supervisor
Head of School, Faculty of Education and Arts, Newcastle University

Maurice Brunning
Research student

Complaints about this research

This project has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be provided to the researcher and/or his supervisors at the University of Newcastle by letter, telephone or email. The University's postal address is:

School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia

or, if an independent person is preferred, send your concerns to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellery, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia, telephone (02) 49216333, email Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au.

Appendix G

Participant Consent Form

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

Professor Max Smith
School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia

Phone: 49854957
Email: Maxwell.Smith@newcastle.edu.au

CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPAL PARTICIPATION

Research Project: **School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation**

Professors Max Smith and John Fischetti	Maurice Brunning
Project Supervisors	Research Student

I would like to participate in the research project titled *School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation* carried out by the University of Newcastle and give my consent freely.

I understand that the research will be conducted as described in the Principal Information Statement (PIS), a copy of which I have received and retained.

I understand that all information gathered as part of this research will remain confidential to the researchers and be kept secure as set out in the PIS.

I understand that the recordings will be transcribed by *Digital Transcripts*. The company's policy states: "all work is treated as confidential and staff are required to sign confidentiality agreements."

I consent to participating in 3 or 4 face-to-face (or telephone if necessary) interviews that will be audio recorded and understand that I will be able to review and edit my interview transcriptions.

I understand I can withdraw consent for my participation in the study at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction either in writing or by direct contact with the researchers.

I would like to receive a summary of the findings .   ☐ Yes   ☐   No

Print Name:

....

Name of School:

....

Contact details: Phone: ....   Email: ………………………..

My preferred venue for the first interview is

………………………………………………………………….

Signature: ....   Date: ...... / ...... / 2015

School Leaders' Perceptions of the Drivers and Impediments to Site-Based Innovation

Maurice Brunning, BSc, DipEd, MEdAdmin

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts, The University of Newcastle

December 2017