

### **Paper 3 Phases of Success: The Layering of Leadership**

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#### **Background**

In this chapter, we analyse the ways in which case study heads varied the strategies and the combinations of these which they employed over time, as they built success in their schools. We found that their diagnosis of contextual needs as well as their values and vision were central features of their leadership. Heads tended to prioritise some strategies during a given phase of development, thus 'seeding' others, which themselves later were prioritised. A prime example of this was the way approached the 'distribution of leadership' and built that progressively. While heads valued the importance of a creative curriculum from the early phase, most worked on teacher quality and teaching standards in the first phase, ensuring that these were in place before enriching the curriculum, which tended to be prioritised in the later phase. However, all schools were identified as moving through three broadly distinctive phases:

- early foundation Phase;
- middle developmental Phase; and
- later enrichment Phase.

#### **Research Questions**

The identification of these phases and their associations with internal and external capacity building and external measures of success have implications for headship training and development. For instance, certain strategies tend to be more successful when preceded by others which set the scene for their development. Heads need to consider the particular phase and context of their school in determining which strategies they should prioritise at which time.

This enabled the identification of the relative foci of their attention within and between the different phases. The phases used for analysis were those identified by the head in the first instance; and starting points of head's tenure varied from 1984 to 2002. Phases varied considerably in length, though tended to be three or four years, and the heads all identified between three and five phases in total. Later, the research team overlaid the results with pupil attainment and Ofsted data. This enabled two pictures to be drawn showing: i) the general upward trajectory of school improvement in relation to timing and the combined use of particular strategies; and ii) the more complex nuanced picture of improvement over time in relation to external qualitative and quantitative judgements of pupil outcomes.

#### **Methods**

The line of success data were collected from round 5 interviews by establishing which strategies were employed in each of the phases identified by the heads. These were analysed in the first instance by creating a chart showing the schools and their phases across the top and the strategies under the above matrix headings down the side. The chart was then used to determine which strategies tended to be emphasised in each phase.

#### **Frame**

Certain key strategies were prioritised within and across the phases of leadership, while others are given particular emphasis in particular phases.

- Consistency of teaching practices and performance management of teachers tended to be a feature of the early phase, curriculum enrichment was rarely evident until the later phases, when standards issues had been resolved.
- Some strategies clearly built on others. For instance, schools learnt to use and analyse data effectively to inform teaching decisions before they introduced a personalised curriculum.

Key issues underlying all leadership phases are the ways in which heads progress the development of individual relational and organisational trust and their trust is a fundamental element that is present in each school. The development of a culture of trust is a consequence of the qualities and values of the head, and are demonstrated through strategies and actions. These may include: building relationships based on respect, a feeling of being part of a team, a caring, supportive environment with low stress, and at the same time an environment of high expectations based on competence and professionalism starting from the leadership. The evidence in these case studies show that trust is a value and disposition of the head, and that it is developed over time. Trust is associated with the levels of leadership distribution.

### **Research findings**

This research represents a unique empirical and context informed account, over time, of the leadership values, qualities and actions by which heads, in particular, exercise direct, intentional influence on pupil behaviour, staff commitment and quality, teaching and learning conditions and, through this, pupil outcomes. The research demonstrates that heads in more effective schools are successful in improving pupil outcomes through who they are - their values, virtues dispositions, attributes and competences - the strategies they use, and the specific combination and timely implementation and management of these strategies in the unique contexts in which they work.

As we have seen, the school leader has become more pivotal to improvement efforts as a result of large-scale and extensive policy reform over the past twenty years. The image that we see emerging from this research on successful schools is of individual leaders working to transform a system that for some time has been based on prescription to one where 'professionalism' provides the basis of a new approach. The key question is 'how do we get there?' We cannot simply move from one era to the other without self consciously building professional capacity throughout the system. Although this research has not focused specifically on this question, there are, in conclusion, two further implications for policy:

The first is to emphasise that this not an argument against 'top down' change. Neither 'top down' nor 'bottom up change' work just by themselves, they have to be in balance - in creative tension. The balance between the two at any one time will depend on the heads' diagnosis of the development phase of the school and policy context and their prioritising and layering of strategic actions.

Second, in creating this new landscape of schooling, policy makers need to understand the limitations of their role and to focus their energies increasingly on creating the conditions in which this new professionalism can thrive. This implies horizontal and lateral ways of working with assumptions and governance arrangements very different from what we know now.