

Chapter Four: Leadership – theory & practice

Chapter abstract

In Chapters Two and Three we described how the Robert Clack School managed the change to success from a previous failing situation through the actions of the headteacher and the senior leadership team, which were fully supported by the governing body. In this chapter, we examine how leadership attitudes and behaviours were not static, but evolved through subsequent years to create, sustain and extend the ethos of the school to make it one of the most successful state-maintained secondary schools in England whilst not losing sight of its core value – to meet the needs of the local community and sustain the comprehensive ideal. We will demonstrate that whilst leadership in this school has been transformational, and ultimately collective, it has not followed a modelised approach to school improvement.

Keywords:

Situational Leadership * Management * Headship * Collective Leadership * Succession planning

Leadership in action

Leadership theory, originally seen as a sub-set of management theory, evolved during the last century mainly from the world of business and commerce. The primary focus of the formal leader of any business-oriented organisation was the profit margin, frequently defined in monetary terms. Treatment of the workforce corresponded to the twin needs of effectiveness and efficiency, with a growing realisation during the second half of the century that the use of labour was less productive than their involvement and engagement. The general direction of travel in this regard was towards *transformational* rather than *transactional* leadership, with both approaches based on an understanding that leadership involves the ability or

capacity to gain results from people through persuasion to achieve a shared purpose (Mir, 2010).

Transactional leadership relies on a system of rewards and punishment that work as key motivators, whereas with transformational leadership a common goal is supported by engaging one person with another in a relationship that raises their level of motivation and morality. The key desired outcome in both approaches is to “motivate, influence, and enable individuals to contribute to the objectives of organisation of which they are members” (House et al., 2004: xxxi). This was in stark contrast to management models evident in the first part of the twentieth century which were based around the efficient deployment of labour, best described in the model of *Scientific Management* (Taylor, 1911). As leadership theory evolved it identified a need for membership and shared decision-making, with the role of the formal leader becoming one of facilitator rather than controller. By the beginning of the current century transformational leadership was the expected norm within organisations, with the formal leader being the symbolic representation of shared aims and goals.

Educational organisations, and especially state maintained schools, are typically structures which provide service on behalf of larger society, rather than being profit-oriented. Educational organisations are thus concerned more with process than profit, with their primary responsibility being to enhance the life chances of the student body they served. A further feature is that the highly qualified workforce typically found in educational settings tends to exhibit characteristics associated with members of organisations who expect power to be distributed equitably. In other

words, they are organisational members who expect to be engaged in strategic decision-making as well as determining their own actions. Despite this it was not until the last quarter of the previous century that leadership theory evolved that was specific to education, initially with the development of *Instructional Leadership*, which emerged from the early work of Edmonds (1979) who began investigating why some urban schools in the USA were outperforming other similar schools. Until then the more general approaches of transactional and transformational leadership were applied to education in much the same way as to other occupations and organisations, with formal leaders being encouraged to engage organisational members as far as it was feasible in the search for improvement. The impact of instructional leadership, based as it was on maintaining a focus on student learning, was felt most keenly by individual school leaders who could thus identify their key purpose and major avenue of influence to be the enhancement of the student learning environment. Further evolution of this mode of leadership took place as we moved into the current century, culminating in the identification of the construct of *Pedagogical Leadership* which we describe as:

... an extension of ideas pertaining to learner-centred leadership where the key focus of school leaders is on the personalization of education for the benefit of the learner as opposed to the organization or system. Consequently, we consider pedagogical leadership differs from other approaches in that it is more than just supporting teaching and learning. We see it is responsive to the local community as well as to larger society, to be relevant to situation and context and to carry with it an expectation that actions should not be pre-determined. (Male and Palaiologou, 2017b: 735)

What needs to be recognised in this chapter, therefore, is the need to explore leadership approaches that are relevant to situation and context and allowed the Robert Clack School to move towards sustained improvement. The journey began,

as detailed in Chapter One, with a need to turn round the school in a dramatic and directional manner.

Turning round a failing school

An examination of the type of leader needed to turn round a failing school suggested that long-term and sustainable impact needed leadership that would “redesign the school to create the right environment for its teachers and the right school for its community” (Hill, Mellon, Laker and Goddard, 2016). This particular study of 411 academies in England identified five types of leader, each of which had effected change on a failing school. They were categorised as *Accountants*, *Architects*, *Philosophers*, *Soldiers* and *Surgeons*, with the study concluding that although each effected improvement, Architects outperformed the others as will be illustrated more fully below.

Accountants seek to grow their school out of trouble. With a focus on balancing income with expenditure they seek revenue increases and entrust teachers to obtain resources and enhance the learning environment. As can be seen from Figure 2, however, the research demonstrated that in such instances student attainment did not necessarily improve, even though financial security was frequently achieved with such leadership. *Philosophers* meanwhile seemingly spend their time exploring and debating better ways to establish more effective learning environments without impacting on student behaviour or notions of performativity. The outcome of such a leadership style, suggested the researchers, was no change in student attainment or financial outcomes.

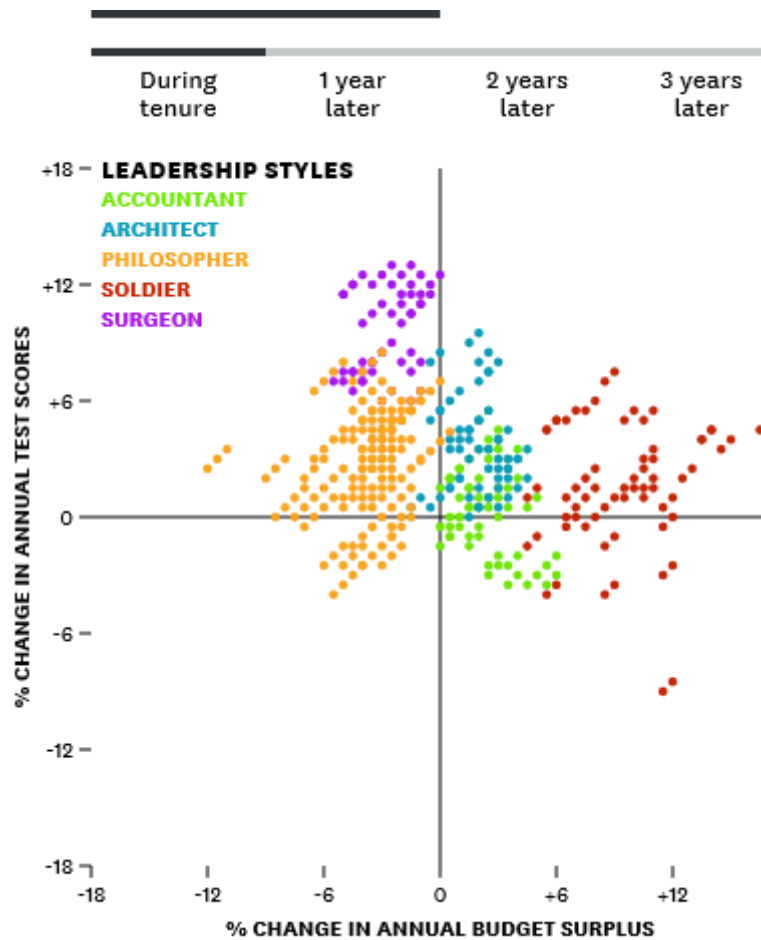


Figure 2 - The impact of leadership style

The remaining three styles of leadership did demonstrate positive outcomes in terms of student attainment, but only one - *Architect* – was found to be able to sustain such improvement. *Soldiers* were classified as being task oriented and focused on efficiency, with the elimination of waste as a priority. Their impact was limited to financial outcomes, report the researchers, with the unwanted side effect of reducing staff morale and the aftermath, following their departure, of costs returning to where they were when the school was failing.

Surgeons were characterised as being decisive and incisive, quickly identifying what's not working and redirecting resources to the most pressing problem, most often focusing on how to improve the next batch of exam results. This typically meant a plan of action that removed underperforming or difficult students and introducing a close focus on teaching and learning that would improve results, particularly for those students facing final assessments. Such an interventionist strategy had often been reified in political debate with allusions to 'super heads', as envisaged by Michael Gove when he was Secretary of State for Education in England between 2010-14, being the answer to turning around failing schools (Dejevsky, 2013). Their impact was illusory and short term suggested Hill et al (Ibid), however, with such leaders often departing soon after their arrival. Indeed, many examples of such turnaround leadership of schools by so-called 'super headteachers' have shown short-term gains that required additional efforts to sustain such improvement (Centre for High Performance, 2016).

Architects, concluded the research team, are the only leaders who can create and sustain long term change, through redesigning the school and transforming the community it serves (Hill, Mellon, Laker and Goddard, 2016). Typically, such leaders seek to improve student behaviour, secure revenue streams and improve the student learning environment (primarily through teaching). Furthermore, time and energy should be spent on working with the local community not only to engage support for the changes being made to internal operations within the school, but also to realign expectations. The initial target for improvement in such cases was with the early years of the student experience at the school, a process the researchers determined

often means improvement was not immediately apparent, but manifested subsequently.

Defining headship behaviour in the school

In the early stages of the Robert Clack School journey to improvement it would be possible to view the actions of Paul, as headteacher, as matching the style of a surgeon as seemingly he was ruthless in his treatment of students who would not conform. Similarly, the close attention to good quality teaching – the ‘Good Lesson’ – was a common feature of interventionist headteachers seeking to enhance examination results. The two measures which suggested to us that Paul was not a ‘surgeon’, however, were the length of tenure of teachers at the school, with many having spent almost their entire careers there and the evidence of investment in the future by working on the younger age groups in the school.

The length of service from the school workforce was explored in the previous chapter, but one further example illustrates why Paul cannot be considered as a ‘surgeon’. The deputy headteacher who had been in post at the time when Paul became headteacher was still employed at the school during our research, albeit as the business manager. The fact that he stayed is one typical example uncovered in our research that demonstrated a commitment to developing rather than replacing staff, which is not operating style of a ‘surgeon’.

The other factor we determined about Paul not being a surgeon was the way in which he went about effecting change for the benefit of improving the student learning environment. He and the governors made a plan for long term

improvement which would represent only a small difference to students in the upper school (Years 10 and 11), but a process that would make a major change to the younger age groups, as illustrated in Chapter 2. Thus Paul was given licence to focus on the longer term, but in fairness to him that was his plan anyway and was something that was within his application and demonstrated in the selection process. The introduction of the 'Good Lesson', therefore, was the first step to create an entitlement to a learning environment that was based on the principle of individual rights. This was fundamental to the philosophy of Paul who, driven by a personal value system rooted in his working-class background, based his approach to education on what we have described in this book as the 'comprehensive ideal'. With such a philosophy underpinning action the leadership style in the school was determined to have a long-term focus and to build the infrastructure necessary to effect sustained excellence. These were not the actions of a 'surgeon'.

Neither could his actions ultimately be aligned to the three other descriptors applied to headteachers by Hill et al (2016) of *soldier* (seeking order), *accountant* (seeking efficiency) or *philosopher* (seeking to implement an alternative approach to learning). As illustrated above, the most effective long-term change mechanism for a failing school is for the headteacher to be an 'architect' who seeks to "quietly redesign the school and transform the community it serves" (Hill et al, 2016). The role that Paul played was driven by that long-term purpose, even in the early days of his tenure which was characterised by the fight to regain adult control and enhance the reputation of the school, particularly in the eyes of the local community. Behind that superficial and temporary façade of confrontation, however, was a determination to protect and promote the interests of every student, an approach that was summed

up by his statement during his first interview with us in March, 2012: “if these children have been let down that’s a disgrace, it’s outrageous”. His long-term ambition was to build social capital in an area of sustained poverty and for students to not only transcend their community background, but also for the community to transcend itself.

Formal leadership in action at the Robert Clack School

Having considered all the leadership styles offered by Hill et al (2016) we are of the view that Paul’s behaviour blended many the key features, but none of them adequately describes him in action. Instead we have borrowed and adapted the phrase of *Design Engineer* which we consider to be more accurate. A design engineer typically works with others to ensure the product or process functions, performs and is fit for its purpose. In this circumstance, therefore, the ultimate intention was to develop an environment that was based on values and principles, rather than a formulaic approach to improvement.

Such an approach to leadership is beyond what is to be found in high reliability organisations which ‘deliver’ dependable performance and guaranteed effectiveness (Leithwood et al, 1999) and is more akin with ‘Level Five Leadership’ which takes an organisation from good levels of performance to greatness through “a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will” (Collins, 2005: 136). Leaders at this level know what they want, but are humble enough to recognise that others in the organisation may have better ideas. Their behaviour is typified by a tendency to give credit to others while assigning blame to themselves. As will be seen below and

again later, these are behaviour traits that were regularly seen within Paul in his journey as headteacher.

On analysis, there was little in terms of originality to the behaviours adopted as Paul and the senior leadership team initially engaged with the process of developing the learning environment within the school. Indeed, the adopted approach bears a remarkable similarity to the model of leadership developed nearly fifty years ago, initially known as the 'Life Cycle Theory of Leadership' (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969). This style was renamed as '*Situational Leadership*' during the mid-1970s and demonstrates how successful leaders could adapt and adjust according to context and circumstances. There was nothing geographical about the 'situation' as it was more to do with the readiness and capability of those other than the formal leader to exhibit behaviours which were at least as productive. This corresponds to the notion that all aspects of formal leadership and management are about influencing others to adapt their behaviour or attitudes, with the essence of effectiveness being the achievement of objectives with and through other people. In other words, formal leaders need to be able to influence other people to take actions they may not have otherwise done if left to their own devices. 'Influence' is a powerful word at this point, especially in the context of a social organisation such as a school, as it implies persuasion, rather than enforcement. The model of situational leadership that emerged from the work of Hersey and Blanchard characterised leadership styles into four categories of behaviour:

- Directive,
- Coaching,

- Supporting
- Delegating.

These styles were then moderated according to the capability of followers which were defined as their 'maturity' level which were classified on a range of 'low' to 'high'. Each of the four 'M' levels identified indicated the perceived capability of the follower to perform the required tasks ranging from M1 (unable and insecure), M2 (unable, but confident), M3 (capable, but unwilling), through to M4 (very capable and willing). What made the model very successful, however, was the way in which maturity was also linked to expertise and not just experience. In other words, seasoned and experienced staff could struggle with a new task in the same way as a novice worker might in the early days of their employment. The Hersey and Blanchard model was seen as applicable across occupations and to provide a lens through which employee capability could be judged and addressed through a combination of 'sell' and 'tell'. Staff being required to take on a new task could be judged as needing directive behaviour and motivation to change behaviour (high tell/high sell) whereas a worker with growing maturity could achieve the necessary levels of performance where there was low tell/low sell.

The concept of situational leadership can thus be applied to much of the pattern of behaviour exhibited throughout Paul's time in the school as headteacher. In the early days of change when he first took over as headteacher he was very much in directive mode and in the habit of instructing others to how to behave. This was very much against his preferred style, which is one of persuasion, but it was an expedient requirement given the situation. As other senior staff and members of the school

workforce grew in confidence and capability so he could allow much more opportunity for them to make decisions and take actions that supported the overriding desired ethos for the school. In keeping with the model, however, there were occasions when he felt the need to exert direct authority and to take personal control when circumstances required.

This is a leadership approach which trades on the notion of being visible when things are going wrong, yet invisible when they are working well. This, in turn, lends itself to the notion of collective action whereby all participants are encouraged to consider success as being because of their own actions. The concept of the invisible, but effective leader, is perhaps best captured by Thatchenkery and Sugiyama (2011) who describe such a leader as one who takes responsibility for failure, yet in times of success allows the team to shine and take credit for work they accomplish together. This kind of leadership, they suggest “finds its roots in cultures with collective mind-sets [where] success belongs to the whole and not to one individual” (42). The formal leader “at this level is thus a facilitator rather than a controller, guiding people rather than directing them [whose behaviour] become less obvious and goes almost unnoticed as colleagues take immediate responsibility for decision-making and leadership activity” (Male, 2006: 15). We describe this as building leadership capacity within the organisation and prefer the descriptor of ‘collective leadership’.

Collective leadership

There are many concepts within the leadership theory base which describe the notion of sharing leadership responsibilities and tasks, of which ‘*Distributed Leadership*’ is most commonly used. Distributed leadership commonly refers to a

group or network of interacting individuals who engage in concertive action. Such joint action leads to the scenario whereby:

... people work together in such a way that they pool their initiative and expertise [and] the outcome is a product or energy which is greater than the sum of their individual actions. (Bennett et al, 2003: 7)

We are reticent to use this construct in favour of 'collective leadership', however, due to two factors: the nature of leadership itself and the relationship dynamic expected within the school workforce. Leadership, as suggested above, is about decision-making, rather than the enactment of such decisions. In other words, leaders make choices about behaviour that needs to be enacted or attitudinal change, whether their own or of someone else. Management, on the other hand, is about the delivery of agreed courses of action. Too often we have seen working situations where we are witnessing distributed management, rather than leadership. Within school settings there is also typically the concept of 'collegiality', whereby qualified teachers expect a level of autonomy especially within their field of specialism. The combination of these two factors lead us to prefer the term 'collective leadership' when describing a preferred mode of operation.

As explored in an earlier work by one of us, any devolution of decision-making comes with a risk and if the formal leader is really looking for decision-making from others within the organisation they must also be prepared to live with the consequences of failure for which, as an individual, they will still be accountable. It is an approach from formal leaders that requires strong nerve as:

Excellence is never achieved without risk. [When] seeking to enhance the leadership capacity within your school [you have to give] people permission to fail and as Einstein said 'show me someone who hasn't failed and I will show you someone who has learned nothing'. Developing leadership capacity is

about individuals learning how to take decisions and actions and that will mean that some mistakes and failures are inevitable. (Male, 2006: 102)

It was apparent to us that there was a clear strategy to build leadership capacity within the school and not to rely on the personal capability of Paul as the initiator of change. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see how the shift to operations we witnessed in our research was underwritten, perhaps unwittingly, by the concept of *subsidiarity*. This is the notion of leaving power as close to the action as possible. It is not a new word, but that one that was which seemingly coined by the Roman Catholic Church and turned into a moral principle which drove decision-making. Leadership, as illustrated above, is exercised at the point of deciding what needs to be done when faced with novel or unexpected circumstances. For efficient and effective decision-making this cannot be a centralised process in any organisation, but the principle of subsidiarity cannot work without mutual confidence between those who are accountable and those who are operating on the periphery of power (Handy, 1994).

What we saw in the school was the principle of subsidiarity in action, but this was built on mutual trust which had emerged over a significant period. Staff at the point of action, particularly teachers and student support staff, were shown to be unwilling to engage with issues beyond their immediate sphere of influence in the days before Paul became headteacher. This inaction was evident at the beginning of his tenure as headteacher as we saw in Chapter One, when the common areas of the schools were dominated by the student body and classrooms often being the only adult safe domain. Before choosing to take personal responsibility, however, staff had to know

they could trust their formal leaders to support their actions to change student behaviour and attitudes.

Building trust is a two-way process, however, and takes time as Handy (1994: 125) indicates when he stated that “a person must remain in post long enough for others to judge the consequences of their actions and decisions [and] to be ruthless if the confidence turns out to be unjustified”. In that instance, Handy is referring to what formal leaders should do if the trust he placed in his colleagues was unjustified. In other words, Paul had to place faith in the school workforce to respond to his change initiative, but be ruthless if they did not respond. In return, the school workforce needed evidence and reassurance that their attempts to discipline the student body would be matched by actions taken by the senior leadership team. Examples of the type of response needed from those with formal leadership have already been provided in Chapter Two, but are summed up by a teacher with over 30 years of experience at the school who described the transition from where the impetus prior to the appointment of Paul as headteacher in 1997 had:

[...] flipped too far, to the liberal side, with the kids having rights, but not responsibilities. Paul brought that back [when he tells the students] ‘if a teacher does something wrong you tell me about it, if it is proven, the teacher will be in trouble. If you tell me the teacher has done something and you are lying, you are in trouble. For every right there is a responsibility - if you want your rights, do your responsibilities’. (Head of Department – May, 2013).

Here we can see the common features of formal leadership behaviours that began to permeate the school – trust and ruthlessness. If someone could not match the trust placed in them, either students or the school workforce, then ruthless action would be taken. As can be evidenced from the feedback we got from participants in our research the early days of directive and ruthless action, particularly when regaining

adult control of the school, developed into collective leadership of the school workforce that was underwritten by core values and a determination to embed feelings of success in the student body.

With the sustained concentration on acceptable student behaviour and effective teaching the staff of the school began to place their trust in the formal leaders, the headteacher and senior leadership team. Knowing they would be supported encouraged the school workforce to engage more fully with issues beyond their immediate control. More importantly, however, they began to recognise their voice as being important, their ideas to be encouraged and their decisions to be supported.

This does not mean that there was an absence of conflict, as all organisations based on subsidiarity are “full of argument and conflict, but it is an argument among trusted friends, united by a common purpose” (Handy, 1994: 127). What emerged soon after beginnings of change in 1997, characterised by directive leadership, was a claim of growing trust between the workforce, the senior leadership team and the governing body:

I do think I've been teaching the team about respect, about empathy, about being strong when it's appropriate and about being sympathetic when it's appropriate. (Sir Paul, July 2013)

In turn, this feeling of trust was transmitted to the community through their own experiences and those of the student body. From those early days emerged the common purpose of seeking and sustaining individual success for all members of the student body, underpinned by a leadership approach which encouraged decision-

making amongst the workforce that was relevant to situation and context. The experience of one recently appointed middle leader provided testimony for this:

Simple things like senior leadership addressing you, asking you how you are, how things are going and actually coming across as approachable [...] that you can give an honest opinion and you can get an honest answer. I think those interactions immediately make you feel a lot more motivated to be part of the team and to follow the agenda really.

In summary, therefore, we are arguing that Paul, as the *design engineer*, moved through a range of styles and modes to achieve the declared aim of 'no child being let down'. As a Situational Leader he chose his leadership style accordingly; as a Level 5 leader he maintained the ability to exhibit humility; as the formal and accountable leader he encouraged collective leadership throughout the school community, described by one of the senior leadership team:

Paul gives his staff a lot of trust and a lot of respect, shows a lot of faith in his team and that filters through all of the layers in the school. In any organisation you've got a hierarchy, but the way we see it is that we have all got our role to play and because of that everyone feels valued. We've got is a system whereby individuals in the organisation are trusted to carry out their responsibilities without too much interference. If you're letting people make decisions they will feel empowered, won't they? If they feel empowered then they feel valued, they take the job seriously and it's highly motivating.

It is a stirring tribute and one, based on evidence accumulated in this research, that is justified. The remaining question is, however, is 'was the success of the school based on one man or was it sustainable if he was no longer there'? This became one of our main lines of enquiry as our research progressed and led us to ask frequently about succession planning.

Succession Planning

We talked to range of participants in our research about whether they considered the success of the school was sustainable into the future and, particularly, if Sir Paul was ever to leave his post. It was topic that frequently cropped up in the conversations we had with Sir Paul, but it was also an issue we pursued with LEA officers, governors, senior leaders and other members of the school workforce. The consensus was that the systems, procedures, processes and people were in place to allow for a smooth transition of headship, but that he was a hard act to follow. It was considered unlikely that the school could once more decline to the point where it was not successfully meeting the needs of the student body and local community, but there were some reservations expressed about the likelihood they would be able to have a new leader with similar levels of energy, expertise and enterprise to make the school outstanding in all respects.

One of the LEA officers serving closely associated with the school characterised the general view when stating that whilst many of the necessary skills had been developed in the leadership team and this was likely to provide sustainability. The conclusion was “whether you can take somebody of that calibre out of the equation and have no impact, and people not feel it? I don’t think that’s possible”. (LA Officer - May 2013). The previous Chief Inspector of LEA, one of the key people involved in the appointment of Paul as headteacher in 1997, expanded on this view, but highlighted Paul’s enthusiasm and dynamism for change to be almost at the level of missionary zeal and located in the school itself:

His focus has been entirely and exclusively on that place, those people and that particular community. He’s simply wanted to make Robert Clack as

strong as it possibly can be, but then there's an odd bit a form of quasi-religious element that comes into it which suggests it isn't sustainable. I can't see the school sustaining its position once he goes, although there's just a slight hint with him that he may be good enough, really, really good enough to do everything he can before he goes to stop that happening.

Members of the governing body were of a similar mind, with all those interviewed for this project understanding the prospect of Sir Paul leaving his post was more of a probability than possibility. The timing of those interviews with governors is interesting as the majority took place in late 2013, including one group interview held in November of that year. Paul's influence was central, making him the "marketable brand leader" for the school, according to one of the governors who appointed him to post. If he were to leave (at that time) "that would send a message into the marketplace that was negative". The recognition that, inevitably, he would leave one day left the governors concerned as to whether they would be able to find a suitable replacement. Many potential successors, they felt, might be negatively inclined to apply for the position. The Chair of Governors perhaps best summed it up:

We probably, I would think, at the moment would not get too many applications for the job. A lot of people would be put off simply by seeing the size of the shoes they have to fill rather than seeing it as the ultimate challenge.

Conversely, the school workforce was adamant that long-term sustainability was more probable, given the way in which senior leaders and other staff had been developed. This, coupled with effective systems and processes, encouraged a general belief that there was "a really solid team" with "all the systems in place, everyone knowing what they're doing and the place working like clockwork" (School Workforce interviews – May, 2013). Key to the success of that team building was

the ethos of the school, as summed up by another head of department with over 30 years of experience at the school:

[Sir Paul] has done a great job of putting the next strand of leaders in, that are all Robert Clack through and through, and it does need that, and you have got to share the same vision.

This type of feedback mirrors what Paul was aiming for on his 'mission' to provide a rewarding learning environment for the student body and described the challenge as being "to dig those roots so deep in this type of area that we don't go into the crisis that we had in the past and, therefore, it's a challenge of training a substantial amount of school leaders" (Sir Paul, July 2013). The outcome has been the development of collective leadership, underwritten by core values, for which they feel ownership. It is the epitome of transformational leadership, summed by Sir Paul himself:

You've seen a hallmark of my leadership is once they pick up my ideas and say it's theirs, we're in business. (Interview - November, 2015)

Is the success of the school sustainable? Yes, say the school workforce, "absolutely it is sustainable if you've got the right people", with one head of department adding "if it's not sustainable he wouldn't have done his job properly" (interview May 2013). We close this discussion with two direct quotes from our interviews, the second of which may be prescient:

People have been given opportunities to develop their skills and the aim being that if there is a change at the top the organisation should be strong enough to go on. Provided the person coming in has the same ethos all the people should be in place to keep this ship running and continue on that path to success. (Governor – July, 2013)

Paul talks about succession planning and making sure that no one person is bigger than the organisation, that actually the systems are there, are embedded, so that when the person at the top goes someone else can take over and, hopefully, seamlessly carry on the success of the school. The truth is until it happens who knows? (Senior leader - November, 2012)

Final thoughts

In a previous work by one of us the analogy of engine oil was used to describe effective headship in operation:

Very few remember the oil in their car engine, yet without it the engine would very quickly seize up. Engines will run for a short time without oil, as will a school without their effective headteacher, but both will grind to halt sooner or later without that subtle influence. (Male, 2006: 15).

It is an analogy that works in our view when exploring the leadership practices in the school. Paul's work and the interests of the school often take him away from the immediacy of being highly visible and leaving the day-to-day practices to other senior leaders confident, in the opinion of the former local authority Chief Inspector that "the school will still be absolutely fine". The question, however, is will it run as effectively in his complete absence or will it, like the engine described above, grind to a halt without the 'oil' he provides? Most people we interviewed considered he had done enough to leave an effective school that did not need his own brand of high visibility (and invisible touches), although as illustrated above there was a slight concern from the former Chief Inspector that not enough had been done to prepare a successor. That concern seemingly stems from a review of the way in which Paul has undertaken the role of formal leadership, making it very personal and based on incredible levels of energy being expended and doing a "huge amount of incredibly detailed work on the local community in a way that I don't think I've ever seen any

other head do [and putting] himself under massive pressure talking to all staff and laying it out on the line to all of them individually” (former Chief Inspector).

The idea that Sir Paul, as formal leader, spent most of his days talking to people relentlessly reinforcing the key messages about sustaining the comprehensive ideal is one that is recognisable. “It’s the foot slogging”, he told us in a personal interview in November 2012, “talking to everybody every day for 16 years. Not for 16 minutes, not for 16 hours, not for 16 weeks – for 16 years”, in other words a process that does not stop:

Every person I see I don’t avert my eyes, I always say hello, I always ask how they are, I always make sure they’re fine. And I always make sure I do things in the background. And I say to myself, “You know what? I’ve got 25 seconds to get from there to there and I’m going to use 24.9 seconds to engage that member of staff because I don’t see it as a chore, I just want them to know I appreciate what they’re doing. (Personal interview, July 2013)

More importantly, however, he demonstrates listening to be a greater skill because “in truth I’ve had a clear view of what I believe works, but, actually, I’m listening all the time to what we can do to improve things” (personal interview – November, 2012). Such an approach accords with the quote from philosopher Epictetus (a philosopher who lived in Ancient Greece in the first century A.D.) - “we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak”. The quote is normally interpreted as meaning that you cannot learn much, if anything, while you are speaking, but it can also be used to understand that a single vision has to be tested against other people’s reality for two reasons: to confirm shared understanding and to check whether there is a better way of reaching desired objectives.

The environment Paul has created is in many ways person dependent, but it has been manifested in such a way that praise permeates the day to day existence of all at the school and encourages all to strive for the best. The last word on leadership practice in the school goes to a member of the senior leadership team:

The way he does it really works, I think, because of this praise and people feel as if they've got to put more in. Very rarely do they get real criticism. If it is there it's specific and it's in a helpful way. He never puts people down. Never. And that's what, it's such a non-negative sort of vibe, that's what people like I think. Combined with everything else, a sense of humour and a pragmatic approach to things.