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SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC CHANGE IN PRACTICE

Being a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

by

Julie Roberts, M.A. B.Ed.

Submitted August 2007
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ABSTRACT

This investigation looks at what Head Teachers are doing to make strategic change sustainable. It seeks to determine the ways in which senior leaders are using strategic approaches to build in systems and procedures that will secure improvement over the longer term alongside the short term leadership and operational challenges.

The research focuses upon the key theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework for strategic leadership and sustainable improvement in schools today and the review of the literature looks at the concepts of strategy and strategic leadership to articulate how strategic management is central to sustainability. In developing a theory for action it draws upon the literature to build the main areas of research.

This qualitative emergent study generates data from semi-structured interviews with ten secondary Lincolnshire Head Teachers. The research looks at the situation of the individual schools and semi-structured interviews incorporate both subjective and objective information to demonstrate subjective meanings of events, processes and strategic change measures to enhance sustainable progress within schools.

The findings highlight that sustainability is about sustaining all that is good in a school and demonstrate that there is no single solution for achieving sustainable strategic change in schools today. A taxonomy of nine key principles for achieving sustainable strategic change is articulated in the closing chapter and the conclusions reached within this thesis demonstrate that the main driver of sustainable strategic leadership is having a clear moral purpose around which strategic change revolves. This extends to the wider moral purpose of developing partnerships and sharing responsibility across the community. Sustainable strategic change begins within the school with school leaders sharing the vision, developing the people and working to achieve both the short and longer term goals and then binding this together with external partnerships that renew and revive the creative energies of all concerned.
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Chapter 1

Sustainable Strategic Change in Practice

1.1 Purpose of the Study
This investigation looks at the ways in which senior leaders are using strategic approaches to build in systems and procedures that will secure longer term improvement. It focuses upon the key theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework for strategic leadership to analyse existing practice within ten secondary establishments and develops a comparative critical review of alternative models of good practice. Education is constantly changing and sustainability is sometimes an elusive concept in the ever changing world of educational management. The thesis seeks to explore these issues of sustainability in educational settings to find out what school leaders are doing in practice to make strategic change sustainable.

Wider changes in society are shaping the culture and context in which schools will work in the future and to develop sustainable strategic school leadership that really does last, demands that we know what leaders need to do to make strategic change sustainable. Strategic leadership and management is central to sustainability; it could be argued that a Head Teacher can not be strategic unless he takes sustainability into consideration but strategic leadership in itself does not guarantee sustainability. A Head can be strategic without necessarily creating sustainability but can not achieve sustainable improvement without strategic leadership. It is quite a complex relationship and this investigation attempts to focus upon an identification of theoretical perspectives to exemplify the way these two management concepts fit together if school leaders are to create systems that find better ways of working with an eye on the future.

The research on sustainable strategic change developed from an interest in strategic leadership within secondary schools after reading Bennett et al, (2003), Davies, Davies and Ellison (2005), Fullan (2005), Hargreaves & Fink (2006), Davies (2006) and Hill (2006) with the view that, for strategic leadership to be sustainable, it needs to ensure that planning is built upon sound short term operational systems alongside the long term strategic vision. School leaders need to think five to ten years ahead, they need to be aware of new and better ways of working as they reflect on the issues in the context of the individual school. As they lead their institutions to the next phase of development, they will be using good target setting and short term planning
to create a solid basis for the current school situation alongside longer term strategic
targets if the growth is to be sustained.

"A strategically focused school is one that is educationally effective in the short term but has a clear framework and processes to translate core moral purpose and vision into excellent educational provision that is challenging and sustainable in the medium to long term." (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2005, p.14)

Sustainability is a challenge for school leaders as they work hard to keep abreast of all the current leadership agenda issues: School Improvement Partner (SIP); Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED); New Relationship With Schools (NRWS); Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Every Child Matters (ECM); improving results in line with government targets; balancing budgets and looking to ensure that policies keep pace with new legislation. There are so many areas of constant change that it needs strong strategic focus to manage these competing demands and at the same time lead the school forward with clearly articulated longer term planning and development aims.

1.2 Context of the thesis
Labour government education strategy has, since they were elected in 1997, focused around standards and school systems, yet over these ten years the emphasis of the policy has shifted. The Government white paper, “Excellence in Schools” (1997) stated that the focus would be on standards not structures and consequently improving standards of teaching and learning became the priority between 1997 and 2001. Following on from this, the white paper, “Schools – Achieving Success” (2001) continued to emphasise standards with the introduction of Key Stage 3 Strategy but there was a gradual shift in government thinking towards structures. With the abolition of the Standards Unit in 2005, the government rhetoric changed emphasis to greater structural independence for schools within the state sector as a move to improve standards and the ways this has had an impact on the strategic leadership of schools is discussed within Chapter 4 of this thesis.

The government vision for education as seen in the 2005 paper, “Higher Standards, Better Schools for All” (2005), relies on greater freedom for state schools to drive their own performance forward through self-evaluation and requires schools to work collaboratively to ensure that students have real choices available to them. This drive
has continued with the changes to Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 coming into place in 2008; new structures; new courses and an emphasis on “Personalisation” and independent learning. All schools are now (2007) forging partnerships with other establishments to ensure that students have “pathways” to the 14 – 19 vocational and diploma options available in the vicinity and Head Teachers are working more closely together than ever before. However, as with all change, it is not without its problems and Head Teacher views within this study demonstrate that much is still to be done if these strategic initiatives are to be sustainable over the longer term. This is explained further in Chapters 4 and 5.

School leaders are adept at managing change as it is a constant in their lives. Each Secretary of State for Education appears to equate continuity with standing still and sometimes for Head Teachers it can seem that they do not have sufficient time to embed one initiative before another is forced upon them. The interviews with school leaders undertaken within this study reflect upon change and the pressures they face in their schools today. They talk honestly about how current initiatives affect their leadership, their strategy and ultimately the sustainability of improvements over the longer term.

Sample schools – context and approach
To examine these issues of strategic leadership and sustainability in current practice, this thesis takes the form of a qualitative emergent study generating data from semi-structured interviews. This qualitative study investigates the ways in which Head Teachers demonstrate strategic approaches to elicit sustainable change within their organisation. The approach is through semi-structured interviews with the leaders of ten Lincolnshire secondary level schools.

Schools within the state sector across Lincolnshire are of four different types:

In Community schools the LEA acts as the admissions authority, employs the teachers and pays the full cost of improving, or enlarging these schools.

Voluntary Controlled schools were originally provided by voluntary organisations but the LEA pays the full costs of replacing, enlarging or improving the schools.
Like Community schools they use the Lincolnshire County Council admissions policy.

Voluntary Aided schools were originally provided by voluntary organisations such as the Catholic Church. The Governors of these schools are responsible for setting their own admissions policies and they are responsible for the cost of improving or enlarging the school. However, Governors of these schools can ask for a contribution of 90% from the Secretary of State.

Foundation schools – are responsible for setting their own admissions policies. They are funded by the LEA but the Governors and the Head Teacher are responsible for running the school.

Within these categories there are also grammar schools, one bi-lateral school (a school that has a selective stream and a non-selective stream) and an increasing number of different types of specialist schools where selection takes place for 10% of the intake based upon student aptitude for the specialist area. Each School has their own unique character, intake and context and they range from rural or semi-rural to urban within a comparatively short geographical distance. This makes Lincolnshire an ideal focus for a study on leadership practice as it gives a snapshot view of very different leadership situations, styles and contexts within a single Local Education Authority. The study is based around ten secondary schools within a 25 mile radius and includes a spread of 11 - 18 Grammar, 11 - 18 Comprehensive and 11 -16 Secondary Schools (including the single Bi-lateral School) across the study, to reflect the range of circumstances and issues which Head Teachers encounter in their current practice.

The information sought needed to be grounded in the living experience of the individuals to demonstrate depth of feeling, perception and understanding and consequently semi-structured interviews were felt to be the most appropriate method of study. A flexible approach to ascertain the underlying implications of how senior leaders embed change, not just for the individuals concerned but also for the teaching body who work to achieve the very best for the students in their care required a less rigid structure than formal interviews would have allowed. Questions were not always asked in the same order but the structure created a base plan which kept the
discussion moving in the right direction while allowing flexibility and freedom of response to elicit the truth required within this very subjective topic. All interviews were of approximately 45 minutes duration and were flexible to allow individual responses directly related to the personal experience and expertise of each participant.

As this project set out to establish the features of sustainable strategic change in current practice for leaders of secondary schools today there are four key research questions to be addressed:

- **How do Head Teachers define strategy and interpret the links of strategic leadership with sustainability?**
- **What do Head Teachers do to sustain strategic change initiatives over the longer term?**
- **How do school leaders develop a strategic role in others to make strategic change sustainable?**
- **What are the main factors that influence the practical application of sustaining strategic change in secondary schools?**

**Scope and limitations of the project within this context**

The sample of ten Head Teachers is taken from within a 25 mile radius in Lincolnshire where there are several different types of secondary school. This provides an interesting and varied range of context and although geographically close they include urban, rural and semi-rural schools. One of the advantages of the research working within a limited geographical range is that there is a shared knowledge of strategic initiatives between these school leaders at both a national and a local level. This means that aspects that are alluded to by one Head are often built upon by others in subsequent interviews and this facilitates a closer knit findings/analysis section (even on national topics and how they are working locally such as the 14 – 19 projects) than would have been possible with a wider geographical sample. Head Teachers were extremely helpful and this method was very effective in ascertaining the views of these school leaders on a topic that leads to reflection on what we are doing in schools that we intend to sustain over the longer term.
However, there are some limitations to the study. By researching a sample of just ten Head Teachers in one locality, the findings can only provide a snapshot view the ways school leaders believe we promote sustainable strategic change in schools today. Each Head Teacher works within a different context which is constantly changing and each Head Teacher has a different approach, school history and existing personnel within which to work. (A different sample may well have shifted the emphasis in a slightly different way.)

As the context changes within schools, Head Teachers adapt their way of thinking to suit the current needs of their establishment and as they move on to other posts they too are replaced. Even within this small sample one of the Head Teachers is moving on to another school and consequently, if the project were completed again, even using the same sample schools it would produce completely different material for analysis.

The one thing we can be sure of in education is that it will never stand still. Schools change, the context changes and even leaders change. The recommendations made in chapter five take this into account and I remain confident that the taxonomy offered within this project provides a solid framework for sustaining strategic change in schools today. Our real moral purpose is to lead our schools to provide a learning environment that works to the greater good of all and sustains momentum not just for the short term but over the longer term too.

1.3 Structure of the study
The thesis is written in five major chapters.

Chapter 1 - An introduction to provide an overview and provide background to the context and purpose of the thesis

Chapter 2 - A review of the literature on strategy, strategic leadership and sustainability in education. Looking at key theoretical perspectives for strategic leadership and strategic change, the review demonstrates that these are central to the sustainability debate which unfolds as the review progresses. The review takes five major authors and offers a critique on their view of the main principles for achieving sustainable leadership.
From the information gleaned within the literature review, the main research objectives are identified and the parameters of the research method emerge using semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers of secondary schools.

Chapter 3 - The research design and approach to this study are explained in this chapter. This thesis takes the form of a qualitative emergent study that generates data from semi-structured interviews with ten secondary Head Teachers in Lincolnshire. The qualitative data approach was considered the best design for this type of study to derive information from events in real settings and in a local context to see the effect of the leadership of strategic change to enhance sustainability. As such the research is based upon the situation of the individual schools. Semi-structured interviews facilitate the collection of the data to incorporate both subjective and objective information and to demonstrate subjective meanings of events, processes and strategic change measures to enhance sustainable progress within schools.

The semi-structured interview format facilitated an exploration into the thoughts, feelings and reactions of ten senior school leaders to aspects of strategic change in their schools today. The findings and recommendations on sustaining strategic change arising from these interviews are discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 4 - This chapter is entitled “Findings and Discussion” and is based around the views of the Head Teachers interviewed for this research on:

- Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership
- Strategic Change
- Sustainability and Strategic Context
- Developing People to make Strategic Change Sustainable.

The discussion begins with the views and definitions of Head Teachers on strategy and their reflections and thoughts on strategic leadership in their schools today. This is followed by a section looking at the structures and systems from both within and outside schools that play a part in strategic change initiatives undertaken by these Head Teachers before moving on to a section on sustainability and the influence of the strategic context on the leadership within. The final heading looks at developing
a strategic role in others to involve staff in the change process and enhance opportunities to sustain improvement.

The conclusion to Chapter 4 draws upon facets of sustainable strategic change and reflections are made based upon the key concepts articulated within the literature review. It identifies the main factors which have held influence on sustaining strategic improvement in the experience of the selected ten Head Teachers leading secondary schools at the present time.

Chapter 5 – As a result of investigations and analysis from the literature review (Chapter 2) and the semi-structured interviews with ten Lincolnshire Head Teachers (Chapters 3 and 4) a taxonomy of nine factors is identified to sustain strategic change in schools. These nine principles are reflected upon within this chapter and with reference to the literature and evidence from the analysis and discussions, recommendations are made in relation to leading schools in the current educational climate. Semi-structured interviews with ten Head Teachers indicate that there is no single solution for achieving sustainable strategic change in schools today. They demonstrate that all schools are unique and act within their own changing context, experiences and personnel strengths. However, the conclusions reached within this thesis demonstrate that the single main driver of sustainable strategic leadership continues to be having a moral purpose around which strategic change revolves. This extends to the wider moral purpose of developing partnerships and sharing responsibility across the community.

Sustainable strategic change begins within the school with school leaders sharing the vision, developing the people and working to achieve both the short and longer term goals and then binding this together with external partnerships that renew and revive the creative energies of all concerned. Sustainability is not just about creating change that can last, it is about developing initiatives that stand the test of time without compromising ourselves or others.

The key elements for this thesis are established within the literature review in Chapter Two which follows. They provide the outline for the focus upon the key theoretical perspectives for strategic leadership, strategic change and sustainable practice and these are built upon in the research throughout the thesis.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter focuses upon the key theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework for strategic leadership and sustainable improvement in secondary education today. The review of the literature focuses upon concepts of strategy and strategic leadership and articulates how strategic management is central to sustainability. To do this the literature review is structured around five headings:

2.1 Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership.
2.2 Concepts of Strategic Change.
2.3 Concepts of Sustainability. What makes Strategic Leadership Sustainable?
2.4 Developing a Strategic Role in Others to make Strategic Change Sustainable.
2.5 Conclusion: Sustainable Strategic Change.

The review looks at key theoretical perspectives for strategic leadership and strategic change, demonstrating that many of these are central to the sustainability debate which unfolds as the review progresses. It then takes five major authors and offers a critique on their view of the main principles for achieving sustainable leadership to provide the focus for the semi-structured interview questions which follow in the methodology chapter. Sharing strategy building and leadership is considered an essential ingredient in promoting sustainable strategic change throughout much of the literature studied and consequently the penultimate section looks at developing a strategic role in others and looks at developing and sustaining school leaders themselves as this is an area which is sometimes overlooked.

2.1. Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership
Strategic leadership within schools involves leaders keeping abreast of trends and opportunities in the educational environment both nationally and internationally and sharing this knowledge with others in the school community. This section looks at ways it involves leaders’ ability to consider the long-term future of the school and at the same time hold a clear understanding of the contextual setting of the organisation.
Strategy has been defined in several different ways. The Oxford dictionary defines the noun as, "Long term plan or policy," Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.11) in their text for business students believe it is, "... the direction and scope of an organisation over the long term: ideally, which matches its resources to its changing environment," while Wright et al, (1992, p.3) define strategy as, "top management’s plans to attain outcomes consistent with the organisation’s missions and goals."

However, strategy is a complex process; Davies (2004) demonstrates that it is a term that is often misunderstood in the way it is commonly used. He shows how even government reports can infer a lack of understanding of the longer-term direction setting nature of strategy. It is a concept that requires a number of definitions, as Mintzberg (1998) demonstrates as he works his way through the wilds of strategic management in his “Strategy Safari”:

“Strategy formation is judgemental designing, intuitive visioning, and emergent learning; it is about transformation as well as perpetuation; it must involve individual cognition and social interaction, cooperation as well as conflict; it has to include analysing before and programming after as well as negotiating during; and all of this must be in response to what can be a demanding environment.” (Mintzberg, 1998, pp.272 –273)

Strategic planning and strategic thinking are not the same thing and Davies (2003, p. 79) demonstrates that because strategic planning can become linear, relying on planning alone can result in a failure to break out of old ways of thinking. Strategic planning is most effective when the organisation has not been challenged and the organisation uses it to formulate broad aggregated data within a stable environment over a three to five year time span. He suggests that it is more useful to think of strategy as perspective – a way of looking at things, which would incorporate strategic thinking, vision and strategic learning. In practice, a school may choose to use one or more of several different approaches according to the circumstances and context of the organisation.

Strategy is not just about a linear plan but instead is viewed as a perspective in Minzberg’s (1995) definition of strategic thinking as: “seeing ahead...behind... ...above...below...beside...beyond...and seeing it through.” Strategy is the broader direction view against which shorter term planning and activities can be measured. When leaders see strategy as a process which sets the direction of the school it focuses the efforts of the organisation in a consistent and coherent way.
Research by Giles, (1997), Davies, (2004) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) demonstrates that education literature often fails to give sufficient recognition to the significant difference between the “development planning” that has traditionally taken place within schools and the nature of strategic planning. Minzberg, (1994) observed that in the wrong conditions this old style of development planning can prevent schools from adopting strategic thinking. The analysis of the problems of strategy formulation and strategic planning identified in the Harvard Business Review by Hamel and Prahalad (1986, p.66) also demonstrated the limitations of strategic planning: “...strategic plans reveal more about today’s problems than tomorrow’s opportunities”

They suggest that two models of strategy have emerged; the first making plans around the resources available, closely adhering to financial goals, while the second approach works around the organisation’s strategic intent and looks for new ways of working rather than blaming limited resources. The taxonomy for sustainable change suggested in the concluding part of this thesis refers to the importance of ensuring that suitable resourcing is in place and agrees with the view of Davies and Ellison (2003, p.13) that true strategic planning involves activities, which are achievable and definable within a given timeframe and with clearly identified resources. Definable goals with precise and measurable (SMART) targets will provide leaders with a benchmark for measuring progress and help the management team to re-articulate and re-focus as the strategic plan unfolds.

Davies and Ellison (2003, p.7) articulate that schools need to be aware of the longer term and build a “futures perspective” while also building “strategic intent” alongside the traditional “strategic plan”. Strategy concentrates on the main key issues of the organisation, it deals with the medium to longer - term picture (3 to 5 years) and provides a benchmark focus upon which to gauge ongoing activity. Consequently, strategy helps the strategic leader to have an overview while at the same time provides a focus for checking that current activity is contributing to the strategic goals of the school. Some aspects of education are difficult to control at school level because of externally imposed restrictions. Even government legislation is beginning to take this into account in terms of schools’ budgets as can be seen in Tony Blair’s announcement within the 5 Year Strategy, (July 2004). However, as Davies and Ellison (2003, p.36) suggest: “…some aspects of a school’s activities are
quite predictable or determinable while other aspects are less so but still need consideration.”

Strategy considers the direction and scope of a school over a period of time and bears in mind the resources available within a changing environment. Boisot (1995) looks at strategy development in relation to environmental changes and individual understanding within the school. His framework works around the perspectives of strategic planning, emergent strategy, intrapreneurship and strategic intent and focuses upon the issue that the strategic response adopted by leaders will depend upon the specific combination of turbulence and understanding.

Whereas strategic planning is proactive, emergent strategy is reactive and this occurs when a school faces changes, which although not fundamental to the existence of the organisation, leave the leader with little understanding of the change or implementation. Consequently emergent strategy is based upon a pattern of successful experiences that are built up as the strategy emerges. As schools face new initiatives and challenges from both local and national sources they react to them and build a strategy for dealing within them in the longer term.

When there is a high degree of turbulence and the organisational leader does not have the understanding to be able to plan the detail, decentralised units are encouraged to have a degree of autonomy within two or three central directives. In this way individual departmental or sectional leaders develop their own understanding within a central directive and individual successes and failures create the direction for the school. This “intrapreneurship” is a strategy that allows individual departments to be responsible for limited central targets and is an appropriate strategy when curricular planning is desirable within a broad centralised framework.

Strategic intent sets up a series of challenging opportunities which raise standards in definable areas and provides a broad understanding without the intricate detail. This idea of broad and intuitive direction setting by school leaders is articulated by Boisot (1995, p.36) who refers to strategic intent as a process of: “coping with turbulence through a direct, intuitive understanding, emanating from the top of the firm.”
Strategic leadership builds sustainability into its processes to ensure the long term success of the school and the projects undertaken. Medium-term broader educational measures of success will be determined alongside the short term measures requested by bodies external to the school and leaders will be constantly looking for new development ideas. Davies (2004) identifies this as “futures orientated” thinking, where leaders see a need to keep up to date and look for ways to challenge the current pattern in order to create better opportunities for the future:

“Strategically opportunistic schools position themselves to make a choice between alternative opportunities and choose the one(s) that fits their strategic direction and development framework.” (Davies, 2004, p.25)

Leadership is about getting the best out of people and in order to build a strategic team, leaders must have the ability to link long-range visions and concepts to daily activities and create conditions that motivate staff and students while also securing the support of parents and governors. Head Teachers need to be clear about values and moral purpose and base their actions upon the strategic vision.

Davies et al. (2005) identify the characteristics of strategic leaders and their research looks at what these leaders do to be successful. Their findings reveal that strategic leaders challenge and question, prioritise their own strategic thinking, have powerful networks and display high quality interpersonal skills. In terms of action they set the direction for the school, make sure it happens, align the people and the organisation, define strategic intervention as appropriate and develop their staff to enhance strategic capability. This involves what Caldwell in his NCSL lecture (2004) calls a ‘whole-of-enterprise’ approach where every school leader is able to see the big picture, understand the implications for the school and ensure that others can do the same: “…establishing structures and processes to bring vision to realisation, and monitoring the outcomes.”

Strategic leadership involves translating the vision and moral purpose into action and to do this the strategy needs to be articulated to all stakeholders and then a common understanding of direction and purpose can be built up through shared experiences and images of how a new alternative perspective would look for the school.

Bush and Glover (2003, p.10) see leadership as:
"...a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of a vision for the school which is based on clear personal and professional values."

Through increased participation and motivation to understand the need for change, the strategic leader can influence others and encourage them to be able to define what the future of the school could be. They draw on high quality information from within the organisation and external community to define the desired outcomes and stages of achieving those goals. Fullan (2003a) suggests that if we desire to make sustainable change leaders need to increase the amount of purposeful interaction between and among individuals both within and across systems.

The strategic leader must first decide on the “direction” for the school and to determine this needs to be aware of (and understand) the history and the current situation of the institution. As Garratt (1995, p.2) identifies, leaders must have the skills to look:

"...both forwards and backwards while knowing where their organisation is now, so that wise risks can be taken by the direction givers to achieve their organisations purpose, or political will, while avoiding having to repeat the mistakes of the past."

Davies and Davies (2004) demonstrate that strategic leadership is not only about deciding what to change but also deciding strategically “when” to change. The decision is influenced by the leader’s ability to take note and act at the appropriate time. Strategic leadership links the strategic function with leadership of shorter term planning and requires wisdom which incorporates practical intelligence, analysis, intuition and emotional intelligence as the process of decision making and school improvement is thoroughly entwined in the social context of the organisation.

2.2. Concepts of Strategic Change

Sustainable improvement depends upon the successful leadership of strategic change which means that leaders need to use strategy to form the framework for moving the school forward while at the same time ensuring that any change made is based upon clear moral values. Leading schools is about defining the values and beliefs of the environment and this is an integral part of any strategic change if we are to be successful in providing sustainable improvement for the benefit of all. As Hargreaves
and Fink (2006, p.1) state: “Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain.”

Leaders are constantly facing short term pressures and demands from agencies that are both internal and external to the school but for strategic change to be effective these must be balanced with a clear value system which keeps them on course to achieve the longer term strategic objectives that they are working towards. It is not sufficient to merely produce the plans; strategic change is about putting them into place. Davies (2006) stresses that strategic leaders focus upon a limited number of strategic issues to ensure that plans are translated into action.

Strategic change comes about when leaders are able to build a sense of purpose and direction for the school that becomes tangible in that plans affect practice. Translating this strategic vision into action is not easy and demands that the “system thinkers” referred to by Fullan (2005) are not merely able to design the strategy but are able to lead the initiatives forward in action and make them “real” for all concerned. Strategic thinking is about the longer term and not about the quick fix to turn around a failing school or creating surface improvements for an imminent OFSTED inspection. Collins (2001) believes that high level leadership skills are required to drive forward long term goals whilst managing and leading the day to day ambiguities and challenges which arise. He emphasises that the best strategic leaders are; “demonstrating an unwavering resolve to do whatever must be done to produce the best long-term results” (2001, p. 36). Davies (2006) warns that we must not be distracted by elaborate and elegant strategic designs to the extent that we spend insufficient time on the implementation. “We need to improve the educational opportunities of all our children, and that can only happen if our strategies are implemented.” (Davies, 2006, p.142.)

The traditional view of teachers having an autonomous role is being exchanged for greater interaction with the wider community. A shift is being made at the very heart of education leadership and where just two years ago the emphasis was on Teaching and Learning (in that order) in all professional INSET, the shift in emphasis has been made to Learning and Teaching. The learning is taking centre stage and the teaching staff themselves are constantly learning and adapting to the new approaches adopted. New skills must be learnt if schools are to successfully adapt to the new demands.
externally placed upon them, such as vocational diplomas, and the subsequent funding which follows these initiatives helps to forge new collaboration and partnerships.

Leaders encounter several management paradoxes in leading strategic change and MacBeath (2004) demonstrates that these present a challenge to school leaders. He points out that as schools move from individualism to working more as a professional community we will change the focus from teaching to learning; ask questions rather than rely on technical knowledge; search for evidence based judgements and shift to a greater emphasis on accountable practice. The response of leaders will depend upon their values and beliefs and these changes in turn will also have an effect on the values of the school. MacBeath (2004) uses the framework below to highlight the difficulties leaders encounter.

| The leading and managing paradox |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Innovate                      | Avoid mistakes       |
| Think strategically           | Deliver results now  |
| Collaborate                   | Compete              |
| Be flexible                   | Follow the rules     |
| Delegate                      | Retain control       |
| Generic approaches            | Specialise           |

Strategic change is about thinking ahead, yet the push on leaders to attain short term targets with league tables, accountability for CATS, SATS, GCSEs; AS, A Levels; Vocational; Work experience; IEPs (Individual Action Plans); PANDAs (performance and assessment data) and Fischer Family Trust Data can, if we are not careful, take attention away from longer term plans and our longer term strategic objectives upon which our value system is based. Leadership needs to address the demands of accountability yet at the same time have the courage to focus upon the fundamental values of the school. Short term targets and test results are not separate from the long term plan but rather feed into the whole school picture to ensure they guide students and staff in the right direction towards their strategic goals.
We need to innovate and try new ways of doing things but we need to be able to do this in an unthreatening environment, (this is difficult for schools in special measures with external visitors on the doorstep so often.) We all like to show what we have achieved without having to worry about mistakes on the way. Doing what we have always done will not improve our schools in this rapidly changing world of education management and leadership. We are working together in collaboration of courses more and more, yet schools still face the paradox of being in competition for students and subsequently, financial resourcing that is pupil numbers driven. As leaders we look to participative and distributive leadership yet know that the ultimate responsibility lies with the Head Teacher and the ultimate paradox is that although we strive for a broad and balanced education the current Government sets its store on Specialist Schools and the gains that can be made from emphasising the strengths of a particular curriculum area in each school.

Strategy provides the framework to move a school forward but strategic change must be based upon a clear value system that places its emphasis on providing a balanced education in a sustainable environment with a core moral purpose. From the interviews undertaken within this research, it became apparent that Head Teachers who have been successful in implementing strategic change began with a clear idea of where they wanted to go but saw the importance of building credibility on the smaller strategic change issues to lead into the fundamental change they wished to make. The planning is important and staff need to see the benefit of small change scenarios and then they are more likely to follow. Novak (2002) makes this apparent in his reference to an ideal strategic change scenario allowing the “doing with” building long term commitment to the change established.

The culture of a school is an important factor in relation to strategic change yet this is not easy to define. MacGilcrest et al., (1994) reason that the culture of a school can be expressed through professional relationships, organisational arrangements and the opportunities for learning that exist. They argue that:

“This three dimensions are a practical manifestation of the underlying beliefs and values of a school community. All three are amenable to change so that, not only are they an expression of the present culture, but they can also help shape and change the future culture of the school.” (MacGilcrest, 1994, p.42)
Professional and interpersonal relationships and micro-politics do have an effect on the outcome of strategic change. Individuals can choose whether they approach change in a positive way and this can be influenced by the strategic leadership within the school.

Change can mean different things to different people and while one person may look upon the change as exciting others may take a more cynical view. These are natural complexities when dealing with people and change. It is not mechanistic as we are dealing with beliefs and attitudes alongside the practicalities of systems and resources. The strategic change initiatives that are likely to be most effective and sustainable are those that allow teachers to experience the benefits of change for themselves and where the culture of the school supports reflection.

Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003, p.154) refer to the “Change Frames Project” which identifies seven areas that help learning communities develop strategies for change based on multiple perspectives.

- The purpose frame is concerned with the moral purpose of change
- The emotional frame dealing with feelings on educational change
- The political frame that looks at the changes of power and the power to bring about change
- The cultural frame concerned with relationships and the effect of change
- The structural frame looking at time, space and organisation
- The organisational and professional learning frame to initiate change on a positive basis
- The leadership frame to promote learning within the school

This is the “big picture” of strategic change in practice; it is a way of seeing the relationships and patterns that govern our planning for strategic change. Fullan (2005) calls it systems thinking in action. It is the fundamental requisite for taking charge of change to seek a sustainable and successful outcome.

2.3. Concepts of Sustainability. What makes Strategic Leadership Sustainable? How can effective leaders move schools forward to create better quality education that is of benefit to all and lasts the test of time? It is relatively easy to propose change in education but it is much harder to implement and sustain it. Sustainability
is about being socially responsible – the word itself is not just a metaphor taken from eco-friendly practices, it represents a key feature in preserving the richness and flavour of the best that we have to offer in educational leadership.

"Sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us now and in the future." (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003, p.693).

In their later writing Hargreaves and Fink (2006) build upon these ideas and emphasise that we need to strive for an education system that uses the resources we have to support the current generation of leaders and build the next. They stress that improvement that lasts depends on successful sustainable leadership but they make the point that making leadership sustainable is a big challenge:

"If change is to matter, spread and last, sustainable leadership that stretches across many leaders must now also be a fundamental priority of the systems in which leaders do their work. Sustainability is the first and final challenge of leadership." (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, p.273).

Hargreaves and Fink believe that we should learn from the practice of the most successful private companies that have lasted the test of time to develop our ideas of sustainable leadership. They articulate that we should strive to use our resources by supporting the current generation of leaders and developing the next.

Each of the authors considered within this literature review have different views on what makes strategic leadership sustainable. However, they do appear to share the view that “a core moral purpose” lies at the heart of making any strategic improvement sustainable. Schools are about people and although we live in a quick fix society where television celebrities transform a room in a matter of hours and new technology connects us to the far corners of the globe in a matter of seconds, we are all aware that dealing with the complexities of creating a school environment where learning is sustained, people are valued and everyone is encouraged, supported and inspired there is no “quick fix” solution.

Sustainable educational change and leadership is seen by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) as built upon seven principles “depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness and conservation” to elaborate and exemplify the challenges for
school leaders. Each of the areas is considered below alongside the ideas presented by Davies (2006); Hill (2006), and Fullan (2005) to form an outline of the general principles advocated within the literature to bring about strategic and sustainable change within schools. Of these seven principles the main focus, as it is for all the authors considered within this thesis, is that sustainable school improvement begins with a core moral purpose.

**Depth:**
Within their section devoted to "depth," Hargreaves and Fink, (2006, p.24) advocate that: “Developing and renewing a compelling sense of purpose is central to sustainable leadership.” Although they cite Collins and Porras’s (2002) foundational study of companies where it was found that any purpose that motivates people internally seems to keep companies going, Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p.27) point out that product integrity is the essence of sustainability and that for educational leaders that moral purpose is learning; “…learning that matters, spreads and lasts a lifetime.”

Deep learning as identified by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) is about students and adults enjoying the learning experience for its own sake and becoming involved in working both independently and together to solve problems. Over the years the government reform agendas have often put testing first, then achievement, and learning has almost been a by-product of the system rather than a central focus. The new emphasis on “personalisation” of learning and the Assessment FOR Learning advocated by David Milliband, formerly Minister of State for School Standards, in the North of England conference, May 2004 go some way to addressing the issue. However, for school leaders it has always been common sense that sustainable strategic leadership puts a focus upon learning first, creates a broad and balanced curriculum which focuses upon challenge and the testing is only the measure of the learning that has taken place.

The interviews conducted as part of this thesis demonstrate that leaders have to deliver short term agendas which are often externally imposed upon them. There are constant demands; league tables, OFSTED, SIP, SATs etc. and the leaders who are best able to sustain improvement appear to be those that are allowed to get on with the job rather than being imposed upon by imminent threat of OFSTED or LEA
intervention and special measures. These constant demands need to be seen as part of a process not an event, so that they fit into the larger long term plan which makes effective progress more sustainable.

Sustainability is inherently moral and if we are to develop strategic initiatives which truly last we must develop what matters, develop learning that engages with people and put learning at the top of the agenda. It is about making a difference to the lives and learning of the students we teach to promote our fundamental purpose of deep and broad learning. “The first principle of sustainable leadership is leadership for learning and leadership for caring for and among others.” Hargreaves and Fink, (2006, p.18)

Davies (2006) builds upon this and emphasises that deep learning and profound strategic change that lasts affects all areas of the school and is evident in activities, attitudes and behaviours. He stresses the importance of the learning imperative to develop the skills and knowledge to support real learning that lasts and advocates that the moral purpose of the school must be apparent in everything from the paper work and policies to the attitude of students to others around the school. Deep learning can not be rushed if it is to truly engage and connect with the individuals in the school; it is about nourishing, sustaining and developing all that is worthwhile and putting learning first to the benefit of all.

Length:
Strategic change that lasts over time is not dependent on a single leader; it preserves the most valuable aspects of changes and develops these from one leader to the next. Our challenge as leaders is to take responsibility for leadership succession and accept that we can only influence how our achievements will live on and lay the foundations for further improvement. Sustainable improvement is about length and can be measured over many years and several head teachers but Hargreaves (2006, p.77) points out that corporate succession research shows that frequent succession is often associated with poor performance and that leadership effects do not become embedded in the wider culture until leaders have been in post between four and ten years. (This is taken into account in the research with selection criteria for interviews allowing for 50% with heads of less than 4 years and 50% over 4 years in post.)
Moral leadership is about coming to terms with leadership succession and the delusions many of us carry about indispensability to ensure that we build sustainable developments that endure long after we have played the key role. Speaking at the annual ASCL conference entitled “Sustaining Leadership” (2006) Hargreaves, A. (Boston College, Massachusetts) stressed that to achieve sustainability, leaders cannot afford to be selfish and cited as an example leaders’ attempts to improve their own organisation at the expense of others. He emphasised that where leaders take staff with them to a new school these competent individuals are prevented from being able to move into new roles and subsequently this action denies the school the opportunity of creating new leaders.

Breadth:
For Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p.19) breadth is about leadership that “sustains” as well as “depends” on the leadership of others. It is about extending the strategic vision for change across the wider community and building alliances for strategic change with leaders of other schools. As we spread new ideas within the school we also reach out to support and enhance change throughout the community to further the learning opportunities for all.

The NCSL study identifies that strategically focused schools develop, enhance and deploy: a short term and a strategic perspective; strategic processes; a variety of strategic approaches; strategic leadership and strategic measures of success. These five key areas of strategic leadership are linked to sustainable practice through a “futures” vision. “Learning to Lead” (NCSL, 2005 p.8) outlines several important points to develop leaders’ ability to “create the future.” These include important elements of sustainability. Developing and sustaining a strategic, shared vision is central to ensuring that strategic improvements are sustainable. This is a complex process that involves sophisticated negotiation and a strong “futures” focus. Without vision organisations cannot move forward and progress will be impeded without a shared vision and ownership by key players. “...key stakeholders in the vision creation and implementation process become advocates for the future” (Kakabadse et al, 1998, p.24).

As we articulate the vision and communicate it to stakeholders the quality of the communication is of paramount importance in the sustainability of our efforts. The
learning strategies work to secure engagement and alignment of stakeholders as we move towards and explore futures thinking to align the organisation to develop strategies for focusing on “preferred futures”.

Focusing on the “big picture” is about understanding how the past influences change and working together to secure and develop different strategies to deal with change. Beckhard and Harris (1997) suggest that all changes should be specified explicitly so that the individual can see the big picture which will serve as a descriptive guide for determining the change strategy. The NCSL document focuses upon each of these areas and stresses that planning, setting objectives and monitoring and evaluating progress towards vision, mission and values helps to develop successful change and sustain improvement.

Although these skills are predominantly within the domain of the senior management team it is important to see how building these skills in all team leaders will aid the development of the strategic leadership capacity of others within the school and create an environment that will enhance the opportunities to create greater sustainability. As we encourage others to take on new challenges and give them opportunity to work alongside a number of leaders to broaden their skills and introduce them to other role models, we increase our capacity to sustain improvement. Organisation leaders can benefit the strategic direction when they work with others to reflect on professional values and practices and encourage them to contribute to the strategic management of the school.

**Justice:**
The main concept behind this principle of sustainability is that the leadership should actively find ways to share resources with the community around it; should improve the life opportunities of all within the community and not damage or disadvantage other educational institutions. It is about co-operating rather than competing in order to build sustainable communities that do not pose a threat to each other. This builds well from the earlier points of moral purpose and breadth of knowledge that we see in the former headings.

We are not merely leaders of organisations or managers of people working to achieve short term targets, we are human beings who are part of a wider community striving
to achieve the best for all over the test of time for a sustainable and socially just future.

**Diversity:**
Hargreaves (2006) argues that sustainable leadership encourages and learns from diversity in teaching and that by learning to move forward we will create cohesion for the organisation. Education is necessary for sustainable development and the government is now advocating greater self evaluation within schools, more personalised approaches to learning and greater collaboration in evolving partnerships within specialist schools and 14 – 19 vocational diploma initiatives. Government and education are beginning to create systems that encourage the diversity and flexibility that helps to keep the organisations strong and sustainable while at the same time remaining accountable to others with a necessary emphasis upon improvement in the teaching and learning.

Networking in the educational world is about sharing ideas of good practice and generates professional interaction and enthusiasm for learning both for adults and students. It allows schools to make the most of the diversity across different types of schools and teaching experience to create a positive experience for all involved in the practice. As individuals interact with others they find that their individual and school knowledge is expanded to create a collective knowledge base that provides them with what they need to know.

"With professional dedication and sound leadership, diversity can and should lead to cohesion, not confusion. Otherwise, standardized systems will offer the false dawn of short term results as a misleadingly optimistic prelude to an unsustainable future." (Hargreaves, 2006, p.190)

**Resourcefulness:**
Schools are about people and we need to recognise, reward and celebrate the success of both individuals and the School as a whole if we are to sustain improvement and ensure that people within are motivated and committed to making sure that the best of what we achieve not only lasts but continues to develop. Sustainable leadership is resourceful leadership that does not waste the energy of its staff or its other resources. Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p.21) make the point that “sustainable” doesn’t just mean “maintainable” but that in educational leadership: “The origins and
underpinnings of the idea of sustainability really matter; they give it its moral substance, conceptual precision, and strategic power.”

Sustainable strategic change is able to develop its resource base without depleting or depreciating its human resources. Batstone (2003) points out that to create a socially responsible business with profitability to last over time we need to promote responsibility, transparency, community, honesty, decency, sustainability, diversity and humanity. He emphasises that money and morality can be part of the same package. It is similar in sustaining any educational initiative – if we go for the “quick fix” solution (as indeed is happening in many schools with the current initiative overload) people’s needs can sometimes be overlooked and without full support and integrity the short term successes can fizzle out as the staying power of individuals concerned wears out.

“Sustainability...requires continuous improvement, adaptation, and collective problem solving in the face of complex challenges that keep arising.” (Fullan, 2005, p.22)

Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) found that the “pacesetter” leadership style, although suitable for short term performance is fatal for sustainability. Pushing people to their limit may get compliance and short term targets reached but will do nothing for the longer term sustainability of either performance or organisation. We now have more data in schools than ever before, (Contextualised Value Added, Fischer Family Trust, SATs, CATs, PANDAs etc.) and it is very helpful in setting targets for both short and long term goals to raise standards but we need to use this data wisely. These are tools which are there to help not lower morale; contextualised value added data takes into account the relative deprivation of a schools intake but to look at this alone is not helpful to schools as they need to consider the whole picture using all the data available to them as they take on the ownership of strategic improvement through the self-evaluation system.

The government argues that the way to sustain improvement is to make schools independent within an accountability framework and subject them to greater competitive pressure through parental choice systems. Tony Blair in his Foreword to Higher Standards, Better Schools for All in October 2005 makes the government’s
rationale about sustainability clear when he stated that the government are making sure, "...improvements become self-sustaining within individual schools."

**Conservation:**

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) define conservation as learning from the past to create the future. To build sustainable strategic change we need to be able to see the big picture as discussed above and view the past in order to create the very best possible future. The "Double 'S' Curve" outlined by Davies (2003, p.306) suggests that organisations should have parallel developments going on at the same time in order to develop the existing success while simultaneously building the capacity for new developments. Davies maintains that "doing things better" and "doing things differently" is important but that it is equally important to know when to bring this into operation and what to give up in order to concentrate on what is important. He builds upon this in his later writing (2006, p.135): "The leadership challenge of when to make a significant strategic change is as critical to success as choosing what strategic change to make."

Strategic timing is best when the school leaders are ready for change; the organisation needs change and the external conditions force the change. With this in mind it is important that capacity building is a central component of the strategy for sustainable improvement. Michael Fullan (2005) refers to the U.S. reform act "No Child Left Behind" to demonstrate that when there is insufficient investment in capacity building people are placed in a "high alert dependency mode" and this forces temporary solutions which do little to help the long term prospects of the initiative.

Fullan (2005) advocates that the best way to embed sustainable leadership is for Head Teachers to look for ways to cultivate other leaders, focus on performance, participate in networks and share good practice. He refers to "system leadership" and believes that these proactive system leaders are at the heart of sustainability. The question is raised of how we can develop and sustain a greater number of system thinkers in action. Fullan emphasises that system leaders aid deeper reform and at the same time extend other theoreticians who are working on the same issues. There is some discrepancy between Hargreaves (2006) and Fullan (2005) in the area of balancing short and long term targets, Hargreaves believes that the focus should be
on the longer term, whilst Fullan (2005, p.14) advocates “Dual commitment to short-
term and long-term results.” Hill (2006) also identifies that both are needed within
his ten criteria for creating sustainability:

“...balance short and long term goals – with a clear strategic vision and plan
for the longer term linked to a focus on delivering more immediate priorities
and helping the current generation of students achieve their full potential.”

The idea of dual commitment to short term and long term results adopted by Fullan
and Hill, is in my view an essential component of sustainable improvement and is
adopted as one of the features of the taxonomy which follows in the concluding
chapter of the thesis. We are dealing with both achieving the very best for the
students in the school now and at the same time looking to secure the future in our
longer term planning. Leaders must ensure that they are driving forward with a clear
moral purpose which supports the learning of the students and develops a school
culture that looks towards its long term development.

Hill (2006) looks at both leadership and governance structures with an awareness
that changes are ahead as we move towards extended schools. He places some
obligations on government to create policies that build upon “trust” of a profession
rather than constantly telling schools what to do. With some awareness of training
and planning for the future rather than looking for short term targets, Robert Hill,
(former adviser for the DfES) believes we can: “...provide a catalyst for school
leaders to take a bigger and bolder role in leading future thinking on school
improvement and policy.” He recognises that sustainability does place demands on
secondary leadership and his political background helps him to articulate from
another standpoint that national policy reforms must allow thorough evaluation and
time for proper implementation with a view to the future.

Jacqui Smith, Minister for Schools, acknowledged in the ASCL 2006 annual
conference, that leaders need to be able to influence the system if we are to achieve
sustainability in education. She added that in order to ensure that ministers are in
close touch with the people who are leading schools the government will be
appointing a group of “national leaders in education” in the near future.
These researchers, (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Davies, 2006; Hill, 2006), whether they articulate seven, eight, nine or even twelve principles, all share some worthy themes of how we can attempt to achieve sustainable strategic change; all to some degree agree that we need a core moral purpose, commitment to a shared strategic vision with all stakeholders, a clear awareness of how to balance long and short term objectives and the ability to develop lateral capacity building through networks both within and outside the school. Schools are about people and it is also important to me that we recognise, reward and celebrate the success of all individuals in improvements made in order to further motivate, encourage and sustain the strategic initiatives the school adopts. Staff are our most valuable resource and it is imperative that we show commitment to our practice by energising, valuing and sustaining our staff.

Davies (2004) defines strategy as direction setting through broad aggregated agenda that provide a perspective from which to view the future and a benchmark upon which to evaluate current activities. Strategic leadership is about organisational and individual ability; it is about the leader's ability to lead the strategy forward and translate the ideas into action, align people, strategically intervene at appropriate points and develop the strategic skills and competencies both of themselves and others. To make this strategic leadership sustainable involves building agreement that new ways of working are necessary, building a clear long-term picture of the school and building the capacity to achieve it. It requires continuous improvement and collective problem-solving to deal with the complex educational change schools face today. Quality communication is a key element of strategic leadership as to make a vision real for others takes passion, enthusiasm and conviction. This involves creating the purpose of the organisation that is related to goal development and achievement working on influencing others behaviour as identified by Cheng, (2002, p.526) and Boal and Hooijberg, (2001, p.526).

A conceptualisation of strategic intelligence based upon people wisdom, contextual wisdom and procedural wisdom as advocated by Davies B. J. (2004) will help to sustain our strategic change in schools. We need to make the most of the “people wisdom” and “contextual wisdom” which many of our middle managers already possess and extend these, while at the same time developing procedural wisdom to involve and energise staff for sustainability. The strategic leader must involve the
staff, enable participation and understand what motivates people if they are to work co-operatively together. All the leaders cited in the NCSL project stressed the importance of involving others in the creation of ideas and strategic decision making. It is inevitable that middle managers will be involved at different degrees but what stands out from this research is that the empowerment of the people involved and their ability to take part in strategic processes helps to ensure that the vision is shared and is more likely to have a successful and a sustainable outcome.

"...a school which is dealing with a longer-term time frame or a less predictable environment needs to build in all of its staff a common strategic intent, based on the values and ambitions of the school, which all staff can articulate, and to which they can align themselves. Thus, faced with new and untried situations they can draw on that common understanding as a frame of reference." (Davies and Ellison, 2003, p.40)

2.4 Developing a Strategic Role in Others to Make Strategic Change Sustainable.

Sustainability is a difficult concept to manage. In some ways it implies predicting the future, which in itself is impossible in our changing educational environment, but in other ways it can be seen as raising capacity and awareness to ensure that staff are aware of the different possibilities and directions in curriculum and teaching. The literature on educational reform (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2003; Leithwood, 2004) points to the need for transformational approaches to leadership to secure school development and suggests widely distributed leadership contributes to successful implementation. It highlights that the involvement of teachers in the change process is essential and that collaborative forms of practice lead to success. Leithwood et al (2004, p.76) point out that the successful implementation of external reform requires transformational leadership at all levels and argue that distributed forms of leadership need to be embedded within a vertical leadership structure that sets directions and ensures resources are available.

If we are to enhance teachers' self esteem and levels of motivation to sustain improvements made we need to empower teachers to take on leadership roles (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001: Ovando; 1996). Where leadership is shared with teachers it is more likely to be accepted and implemented by all and teacher leadership literature identifies many positive benefits on educational quality and school culture when distributed leadership is undertaken under the right conditions.
The success depends on many factors from teacher relationships and the ability to influence colleagues to developing productive relationships with the school management team. It necessitates the creation of collegial norms between teachers, gives teachers the opportunity to lead and allows teachers to work together. We also need to provide opportunities for strategic leadership and encourage our staff to look at longer-term issues and set direction to provide a benchmark against which all school activities can be measured.

We need a team of leaders at all levels of the system who are committed to the eight elements of sustainability identified by Fullan (2005, p.14). He points out that systems change frequently and he believes that we need a large pool of leaders who are “system thinkers” in order to cope with these demands. A shared understanding and increased capability would enhance the opportunities available to share ideas and motivate staff to perform at a more strategic level. Fullan (2005, p.31) then builds upon this idea to maintain that the mark of an effective leader is not just the student achievement he leaves behind but is also reflected by, “… how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can go even further.”

Bennett (2003) stresses that a number of individuals may demonstrate the inclination, ability and perception to lead strategy within an organisation and that it is worthwhile to utilise this through “distributed leadership” and involve several individuals in the strategical developments. Other reasons are cited by Minzberg (1998, p.141) who points out that where a single charismatic strategist can help to pull a struggling organisation out of troubled times, this can sometimes fall apart when the individual leaves the organisation at a later date.

This is echoed in the work of others who when writing about the succession angle of sustainability stress that there is often not much planned continuity going on: “…principal succession today is not an episodic crisis but a chronic process” Hargreaves et al, (2003, p80). For sustainable change the Head Teacher needs to view the long term picture alongside the immediate focus on pupil achievement, with an emphasis on developing the team of leaders so that they can go forward even further.
Leading a training session at the national ASCL Conference (2006) Hargreaves argued that it takes at least four or five years to embed initiatives that make lasting change and that leaders need to be at a school at least five years if they are to leave a legacy behind them. Mumby, chief executive of the National College for School Leadership, turned the debate to succession planning and stressed that there needs to be a more systematic way to identify new leaders; “It takes, on average, about ten years of cumulative development to become a highly effective school leader.” Mumby (2006) stressed the importance of speeding up this process if we are going to successfully replace all those who will leave in the next few years and suggested that if education was treated in the same way as the business world potential leaders would be identified in their first year in teaching and given managed opportunities to experience different educational situations and contexts.

The Case Studies considered by Hargreaves et al, (2003) in relation to succession within six high schools, concluded that;

“Planned continuity was a rare phenomenon and mainly occurred when successful schools groomed insiders to continue the work of the existing principal.” (Hargreaves et al, 2003, pp.1 - 2)

Hargreaves later (2006) points out that Head Teachers are most often appointed from outside the school as “fresh blood” is seen as a lever for school improvement. It often works to do this with failing schools but where a school is improving and leaders within the organisation have a clear belief in what the school is aiming for an “insider” may have a better ability to build on what they inherit and not just set out a different vision which fights against the existing school ethos.

To develop a strategic role in others within the school we need to see leadership as the result of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships that are based upon trust and openness. Senior staff must be able to truly share the leadership process and not simply delegate tasks and a team culture needs to emanate throughout the school. The NCSL study (2003) found that distributed leadership can not be “mandated” into existence but needs to develop through the concerted action of teams of people working to fulfil the vision of the school. As we comprehend that it is about recognising expertise within the school rather than looking only at formal positions
we will create and nurture an environment that will help us to sustain improvement through others.

“Leaders are the stewards of organizational energy... They inspire or demoralise others first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they mobilise, focus, invest and renew the collective energy of those they lead.” (Loehr and Schwartz, 2003, p.5)

Distributing leadership and giving others the tools to strategically move the school forward, working in line with the whole school development strategy is likely to enhance motivation and help to build our leaders for the future. Team Leaders are responsible for the performance management and development of individuals and they are perfectly positioned to inspire and support their colleagues in achieving, and subsequently sustaining, the “vision” of the school. Individuals can make a difference but as much of the research points out, (Davies, 2006; Davies & Davies, 2004; Barth, 1990 and Gardner 1999) strength and ultimately sustainability, can be gained from staff working together to achieve the shared goals of the organisation.

“The developmental leader needs to act not just progressively but with high visibility, not so much proselytising as alerting, exposing and explaining – raising consciousness casually in the natural flow of working together.” (Perkins, 2003, p.225)

Through working together, a higher level of trust will develop, morale will improve as the strategic team make better decisions and the strategic ideas implemented are more likely to last the test of time. However, all are individuals: not all middle managers have the desire, skill or aptitudes to become involved in the strategic direction; some are excellent teachers and managers who enjoy their current role. Not all will work in the same way, we would never wish them to; but by focussing upon sharing of ideas, giving others the opportunity to understand and lead the processes and approaches to celebrate and develop the use of skills, experience and understanding we help to create an environment which will encourage the successful and sustainable implementation of strategy.

Davies (2003) advocates an ABCD (Articulate, Build, Create, Define) model where leaders draw together their internal knowledge of the school with their knowledge of external influences to move the school forward. Sharing images and experiences,
developing dialogue and strategic conversation leads to a shared understanding between the participants and allows leaders, “... to say they know where they are going but don’t know how to get there yet!” (Davies, 2003, p.40)

It is important to share strategy building with others and not merely communicate it to others. Korak-Kakabadse and Kakabadse (1998, p.1) identified: “…executives always had vision for their organisations, but whether these visions were shared is another matter.”

Sharing strategy building involves engaging others in strategic conversations and debate to ensure the best direction and focus is established. The strategic leader must step back and articulate how the school is at the current time before leading others into defining what the future of the school should be. Tichy and Sharman (1993) suggest this involves a series of projects being identified and then implemented to move the organisation forward. Making a vision real for others needs enthusiasm and conviction and strategic leadership involves the: “development of the organisation as a whole which includes its changing aims and capabilities” (Selznick, 1984, p.5).

The human perspective is important when we are building sustainable learning capacity. By developing and extending teachers’ capabilities to lead and work collectively and collaboratively, individuals will be more inclined to contribute to school improvement and to their development in a positive way. The NCSL Distributed Leadership Summary Review, (2003, p.7) looks in detail at the implications for professional development for leadership if we are to successfully distribute leadership across our schools. It suggests that programmes should include leadership and management, working in teams, resolving conflict, identification of the leadership community, the role of informal and formal leadership and the importance of developing a school culture of distributed leadership.

Glickman et al (2001, p.49) place “varied sources of leadership, including distributed leadership” at the top of their list of characteristics for improving schools and this potential to improve standards through distributed or diffuse forms of leadership is also cited by Muijjs and Harris (2003) and Day et al (2000):
"...in times of rapid change and novel circumstances we need the most adaptable and flexible structures it is possible to devise." (Day et al, 2000, p.11)

Within a professional learning community, personal development and growth is utilised to improve learning outcomes and there is a central commitment from all individuals involved to build the capacity for learning in order to create: “a living community that learns” (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000). Enhancing capacity for learning should be about: “...all the adults connected with schools working and learning together to enhance pupil learning” (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003 p.161). They build the argument that developing internal capacity depends on people both inside and outside schools. Social capital is critical to effective knowledge and transfer of knowledge and a school’s capacity to build trust and sustain internal and external networks is a key factor to success. (Hargreaves, 2001)

The government’s strategy for continuous professional development (DfES, 2001) emphasised the benefits of distributing leadership between senior and middle management and this formed the basis of the leadership programme developed by the National College for School Leadership. When staff are encouraged to play an active part in shaping and improving an organization they are also encouraged to learn and develop as practitioners. Bennis and Nanus (1985) found that within a study of 90 successful industrial leaders all were open to learning themselves and encouraged their staff to learn.

If we are to enhance capacity for learning and make sustainable strategic change, leadership needs to be shared across the school. Fullan (2001) stresses the importance of developing a professional learning culture which is open to new ideas and has the focus of improving teaching and learning at its heart. Working collaboratively enhances the quality of the work produced. It focuses on shared goals and the process itself leads to discussion, development and dialogue. Collaboration is about sharing the collective knowledge, expertise and capacities of teachers, which creates a collective professional confidence and improves the quality of student learning. This has a beneficial effect on student learning: "It encourages risk taking, greater diversity in teaching methods and an improved sense of efficacy among teachers.” (Harris, 2003, p.113)
Learning is a continual process and the professional development of teachers plays a large part in enhancing the capacity for learning within the school. It is important that teachers are able to exercise leadership through leading and planning development work and support for teachers’ own learning is fundamental to establishing a school culture where the collective knowledge and skills is acknowledged as central to its strategic success.

“Motivated staff feel able to take risks, are excited and enthusiastic about their job and believe they personally have something to contribute to the school community.” (MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed, 2004, p.104)

2.5 Conclusion: Towards Sustainable Strategic Change

Schools are unique institutions that are constantly changing and the challenge for school leaders is to respond to the school’s “inner life” (Harris, 2003) as well as the context. Effective school leaders seeking to establish sustainable strategic change are able to draw on their past experience to respond to school life in its current context, respond to their unique characteristics and endeavour to have a positive effect on the learning of the pupils with a clear moral purpose at the heart of what they do. In times of change it is important that schools can see the context in which they work and adapt creatively to change so that they can create their own preferable future. Leithwood et al (1999) refer to critical thinking as leaders’ “problem solving” processes; as leaders they respond to the unique organizational circumstances they encounter. Sustainable strategic practice will take place within an organization when the leaders ask the right questions, know what initiatives to support and what to avoid.

“Learning communities know how to deal with and creatively take charge of change because they have a collective understanding of where they are going and what is important.” (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003, p.132)

Sustainable strategic change demands passion and commitment; we need the central core values fully embedded to be able to balance the short term and the long term targets alongside the central idea of deep learning for a life long joy in learning which can be deemed truly “sustained”. We are working in an increasingly materialistic world with nuclear families and insular approaches developing as society itself becomes more focussed on a survival and “self first” mentality. School
leaders are at the hub to make a difference; to stand up for moral values and clear purpose to the good of all. The way to move forward is to focus upon real achievement that contributes to new ways of supporting individuals, the school and the wider community.

Within schools, leadership is never invested in a single individual and several researchers, (Harris, 2003; Senge, 2000; Southworth and Conner, 1999; Davies, 2004) have identified the importance of teacher collaboration and suggested that leadership which promotes collegiality, trust and a focus upon teaching and learning is more likely to be self renewing and responsive to strategic improvement initiatives.

Every individual sees the school in their own unique way and it is the role of leaders to provide coherence so that others can see the interconnections and interrelationships between the many different aspects within the school. If we are to cultivate and enhance capacity for learning and sustain strategic improvement it is important that we develop this school wide perspective. (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003; Boleman and Deal, 1997; Harris and Lambert, 2003.)

Schools never stand still, for good or bad they move on, successive government agendas, leadership intervention and even union action make sure of that. When people have a shared purpose and pursue this with passion they can increase capacity and bring about long-term, sustainable, strategic change with a clear awareness of the context in which they work. The school, its community, locality, national and international community are interconnected in varying degrees of mutual influence. Each is led by its own systems and personnel and yet each is also related to the leadership within others. When interactions are healthy the school is able to flourish and build the foundation for sustainability more easily working with others towards common and morally purposeful goals.

“Sustainable leadership often defers gratification, respects the past, scans and monitors the environment, and engages with it in an urgent and activist way.” (Hargreaves, 2005, p.187)

Sustainable strategic leadership is about organizational and individual ability; it is about the leader’s ability to translate the ideas into action, align people, strategically
intervene at appropriate points and develop the strategic skills and competencies of both themselves and others. It involves being strategically orientated to consider the long-term future of the organization alongside having an understanding of the current context of the school. (Boisot, 1995; Adair, 2002; Davies, 2006).

The NCSL (2001) research project identified that strategic leaders improve the existing systems and strategies and yet at the same time build capacity to move the school forward. Davies, (2006, p.148) articulates that politicians want to see an impact on education now for the money it commits today. For children themselves short term success is an important facilitator to achieve the other things they need to do in their lives but we also need to look to a more holistic framework where a balance between short and long term results is achieved.

Leadership is seen by Riley (2000, pp.46 - 47) as an “organic activity” dependent on the relationships and connections between many people. This is important as the communication, trust and ability to work together is essential in any organisation before it can share and foster leadership across all levels. Sustaining strategic change through distributed leadership involves a reciprocal interdependency embedded within the culture of the organisation so that leadership is more fluid in nature and others are energised into working together in the processes of leadership through problem solving, broad vision, task enactment and strategic conversations. It implies a different power relationship within the school and opens up the possibility of all teachers being leaders at various times. In complex, knowledge based organisations it is important that we see intelligence as infinite rather than fixed and that we view distributed leadership as a network of relationships between people and structures.

This view of distributed leadership is further extended by Gronn (2000, p.331) in his articulation that it is about the sharing of expertise working through interpersonal relationships rather than through individual action:

“interdependence and mutual influence of the two parties is sufficient to render meaningless any assumptions about leadership being embodied in just one individual.”

This implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership task is accomplished more successfully by the interaction of multiple leaders as identified
by Spillane et al (2000, p. 20). In theoretical terms this means multiple sources of
guidance and direction, following the overall direction of the expertise within the
school and working within a common culture and shared ethos. It is an, “emergent
property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their
expertise.” Bennett et al (2003, p.3)

There is an overlap between shared, collaborative and participative leadership
concepts due to definition boundaries in the collective nature of leadership practice.
Distributed leadership is based on social phenomenon rather than on individual
competencies. Bennett et al (2003, p.2) look at distributed leadership as, “a way of
thinking about leadership” rather than as a technique and Elmore (2000, p.14) states:

“in a knowledge – intensive enterprise like teaching and learning there is
no way to perform these complex tasks without widely distributing the
responsibility for leadership among roles within the organisation.”

When positive energy is exploited it is a powerful tool in our quest for sustainable
strategic progress. We need to look towards a balance of short and long term targets
but also be aware that we must give thought to the human dimension; a leader who is
burnt out can be no leader at all and “pace-setters” who put too much ongoing
pressure on others; “…don’t get true performance that people will sustain.”
Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002, p.73)

Self-help books, management literature and courses abound on developing and
energising self and others, with advice offered and information provided on aspects
such as emotional intelligence, quality relationships, physical exercise and a healthy
diet. Fullan, (2006, p.38) points out that there should be greater emphasis on “energy
recovery” to enable leaders to formulate truly sustainable change. He stresses that
positive rituals such as physical fitness and meditation allow leaders to take short
breaks that support their progress over the longer term.

We need to look for ways to energise the people around us, to reflect upon learning
and cultivate other leaders as we work to improve and achieve both our short term
and our longer term goals. The literature on sustainability suggests that on-going
success in education depends upon the commitment and leadership of the head
teachers to promote a culture of professional development awareness within their
establishments. The evolving professional relationships between staff are vital and collaborative learning has an important part to play in creating sustainable strategic change. There are many ways to do this from health days and relaxation training sessions to opportunities to engage in blue-skies thinking sessions away from the workplace; celebration and credit for work well done and giving staff some time to reflect upon learning to determine what is really important in our schools today.

“Leadership is about getting ordinary people to do extraordinary things.” (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003, p.107)

Leaders who succeed in sustaining strategic change use the potential of the staff within to harness their human capital and share the leadership opportunities that present themselves as they make the most of the skills and knowledge within our schools. We need to be aware that staff are more likely to support, promote and make change sustainable if they see it as coming from within rather than imposed upon them and as we articulate values and vision around student learning we are able to create the necessary structures to promote learning. School leaders and their staff need an understanding of the pedagogic approaches and their impact on student achievement and learning with a clear strategic intent to link futures thinking and strategy as a way to provide direction and purpose.

“Effective leadership inspires more than it empowers; it connects more than it controls; it demonstrates more than it decides. It does all this by engaging – itself above all, and consequently others.” (Mintzberg, H., 2004, p.143)

This literature review has established the key research elements for the study to be:

- Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership
- Concepts of Strategic Change
- Concepts of Sustainability
- Developing a strategic role in others to make strategic change sustainable

These key elements lie at the heart of all discussion within this study and they will inform the methodology framework for the data collection, discussion of findings, conclusion and the recommendations which follow in subsequent chapters.

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Chapter 3

Research Design, Methodology and Approach

3.1 Characteristics of the research
The review of the literature has established the key elements of the research to determine sustainable strategic change in practice as:

**Strategy and Strategic Leadership:** involves leaders’ ability to consider the longer term direction setting for the future of the school and at the same time to keep a view of the contextual situation. Strategic leadership uses resources wisely, translates the vision and moral purpose into action and secures conditions that motivates staff and students.

**Strategic Change:** happens when initiatives are taken forward, put into practice and become real through implementation. Strategic change is about thinking ahead and initiatives are more likely to be sustainable and effective when they allow stakeholders to see the benefits of change themselves.

**Sustainability:** is about being socially responsible in order to preserve the very best of our improvements in educational leadership. Beginning with a core moral purpose, sustainability develops what matters, engages with people and promotes our fundamental purpose. It is about taking responsibility for leadership succession; focusing on the big picture; working with the community; co-operating and sharing ideas; being resourceful and recognizing and rewarding the success of all.

**Developing a Strategic Role in Others:** to involve staff in the change process enhances the opportunities to sustain improvement. Working collaboratively helps all in the school community to focus on shared goals and leads to an increase in knowledge and expertise to create a collective professional confidence that has a beneficial effect on all.

This chapter looks at how these ideas can be researched and explores the different methodologies available to undertake a systematic enquiry. The research looks at what Head Teachers are doing in order to make strategic change sustainable in
secondary schools; it focuses upon the leadership of strategic initiatives to improve learning and sets out to determine how leadership roles are perceived to enhance sustainability by individuals involved in the process.

These headings form the basis of the exploration into different possible approaches to ensure that the study obtains a worthwhile picture of the experiences and strategies of secondary Head Teachers working in education in the early 21st century. Sustainable change involves developing the capacity, skills, abilities and conditions to facilitate improved learning within schools and bearing in mind the constraints of time and limited resources available for this project, the approach aims to formulate a good awareness of how far the areas named above are a real part of what is actually taking place in schools today.

Research design is influenced by the notion of "fitness for purpose" as identified by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003). Mouly, (1978) identified the three categories of the search for truth as being: "experience, reasoning and research". These are not mutually exclusive and research demonstrates that these are often overlapping as we seek out the nuances of human behaviour, thought and strategic action. Kerlinger, (1970), points out, "...subjective belief ... must be checked against objective reality. Scientists must always subject their notions to the court of empirical enquiry and test." Procedures and results are always open to scrutiny by colleagues and fellow professionals and it is important that any research undertaken uses an approach which is best suited to purpose in order to retain credibility. As Bassey, (1999, p.38) states: "...research is systematic, critical and self – critical enquiry, which aims to contribute towards the advancement of knowledge and wisdom."

This chapter will address the systematic approach adopted within my research and sets out ways in which it aims to contribute to the "advancement of wisdom" through new ideas and information provided by interviewees and research study.

Concepts of Positivism and Phenomenology

Burrel and Morgan (1979) look at social reality through an examination of whether people's view of the world is imposed upon their consciousness from the outside or whether it is the product of individual awareness and created by the individual's own mind. (The realist position asserts that objects are not dependent on the individual's
thoughts as objects themselves have an independent existence.) Writing on this topic by Burrel and Morgan explores whether knowledge needs to be personally experienced if it is to mean something to the individual. If we look to the belief that knowledge does not need to be personally experienced it demands that the researcher holds an observer role whereas to look at the research as subjective and unique demands that the researcher is more involved with the subject and has an internal subjective experience.

Positivism:
Positivism advocates the application of the natural sciences to the study of social reality but it is difficult to describe precisely as authors use it in a number of different ways. With some it describes a philosophical position that can be seen through research while for others it merely refers to superficial data collection. Bryman (2001, p.11) identifies five principles of positivism:
1. Only phenomena and hence knowledge confirmed by the senses can genuinely be warranted as knowledge (the principle of phenomenalism).
2. The purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and that will thereby allow explanations of law to be assessed (the principle of deductivism).
3. Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that provide the basis for laws (the principle of inductivism).
4. Science must (and presumably can) be conducted in a way that is value free.
5. There is a clear distinction between scientific statements and normative statements and a belief that the former are the true domain of the scientist.

The difficulties arise in that there is no agreement on the epistemological basis of the natural sciences and Keat and Urry (1975) argue that positivism is just part of the picture of the nature of the natural sciences. It is also difficult to see positivism and the natural sciences as associated solely with quantitative research as qualitative research frequently has features that can be linked with the natural science model. Point 3 above suggests that inductivism is also a feature of positivism but it is the deductive element (Point 2) that is emphasized most in social research. Epistemological principles and research practice do not always sit easily together and Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) found that frequently scientists revealed a different set of practices when talking about their work to those identified in their written articles.
For those who strive to find a scientific basis to their social research today there are perhaps three main factors of influence:

- To remain objective and to adopt a rigorous approach is vital in all social research.
- Science has a lot of status in our technological world and is perceived as the source of human progress.
- Objective methods and the production of objective – looking statistics sometimes makes our work appear more credible to other agencies who feel they want something "for their money".

Positivists look for objectivity, measurability, controllability and rules of behaviour in a research world where observed phenomena are important. It involves the social researcher as analyst of the subject matter and works on the principle that science provides us with the clearest possible view of knowledge and our world.

Tony Lawson (1988) writing in the Social Studies Review identifies three main features of positivism:

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<th>Position</th>
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<td>Positivists believe that they should adopt a position of objectivity or neutrality. Their beliefs and values should in no way influence their research.</td>
<td>This is a series of logical steps which the positivist carries out in their research known as the &quot;hypothetico-deductive&quot; method. From preliminary observation a hypothesis is then created and tested using research techniques before a conclusion is reached.</td>
<td>Most natural scientists use experiments, which for practical and ethical reasons are not commonly used in sociology, so sociologists use surveys and the analysis of official statistics to gather quantitative data.</td>
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Positivism is less successful when applied to the study of human behaviour as the intangible quality of social phenomena is not as structured or orderly as the natural world. There are many variables to take into account in the open and uncontrolled situations we encounter in the world of educational leadership and dealing with
people and their unique thoughts and feelings makes this research into Head Teachers views on strategic sustainability somewhat unpredictable. Cohen et al (2000, p.9) point out that in the teaching and learning and the human environment of education the positivist researcher is presented with a “mammoth challenge”. However, the ideals of producing representative, reliable and systematic research remain at the heart of all research. As Pring (2000, p.43) articulates, “the world of common sense” cannot be captured by either quantitative or qualitative research alone but must be an integration and overlapping of both. In educational research on sustainable strategic change we are dealing with individuals, their schools and their environment and as such this has a bearing on the methodology chosen.

**Phenomenology:**

Phenomenology is a philosophy concerned with the questions of how individuals make sense of what they see around them and how a philosopher should avoid preconceptions in his understanding of the world. Bryman (2004) points out that phenomenology has been one of the main intellectual traditions responsible for the anti-positivist position, where researchers of social science are looking to understand how people make sense of their experiences rather that to classify and count them. This places greater emphasis on the extent to which all social phenomena are created by social interaction. The researcher is interpreting the interpretation of others which are then interpreted in terms of concepts and literature on the research area.

Interpretivism requires the social scientist to understand the subjective meaning of social interaction and research procedure reflects the distinctiveness of humans. It looks to the interpretative understanding of social action rather than to external elements. This works on the principle that social reality has meaning for human beings and that they act on the basis of the meanings as they experience them. Taking this interpretivist approach can lead to surprising findings as we are not merely looking at how an individual sees the situation but also providing an interpretation of others’ interpretations.

A phenomenological approach deals with subjectivity, description and interpretations which do not rely on measurement and statistics but instead deal with perceptions, attitudes and emotions. Different interpretations of phenomenology have emerged but ultimately it is about human experience and deals with the routines of everyday
life. The researcher looks at things from the perspective of others and provides a picture of the way these things are seen by the participants themselves. The way people perceive their situations is structured by the way the human mind works and their perceptions shared by those who share their experience within the community.

Advantages of this approach include the fact that it allows the researcher to investigate and provide a detailed picture of the complexities of the social dimension of schools. Based upon real experience it allows the researcher to be close to the participants of the study and is ideally suited to small scale research where there is a lack of financial resource and a greater reliance on the researcher himself.

The difficulties surround the idea that there may be alternative realities and these can vary from culture to culture or even from school to school. There is not one universal reality and different people can see different things at different times in varying contexts. Each must be viewed as valid in its own right within a social research project and although not all interpretations are totally unique we must focus upon a description of authentic experiences.

There is an argument that the subjective interpretation of phenomenology contrasts too much with the objectivity and measurement of scientific approaches and can lead to pure description rather than analysis. The problem can be avoided when the researcher develops explanations around the descriptive data formulated and this research provides clear explanation of decisions reached in the analysis section in order to overcome this concern.

**Approaches to social research**

Within social research, there is an element of choice in the methodology used which is influenced by the strategy itself and reflects the practical considerations of time constraints, resources and access to data. Each method has its own strengths and for research information to be both credible and worthwhile it is important that consideration is given to reflect the most appropriate method in practice rather than considering any one superior to any other. Whatever method is chosen, whether it be questionnaires, interviews, observations or documentation, all are suited to some research better than others, as each has its own assumptions on the kind of data that can be produced to find out more about our chosen subject. Denscombe (2003,
points out that theoretical debate about the merits of their underlying premises; “has failed to find any single method as the universally accepted ‘best’ for all situations.” Each method provides its own distinctive perspective which can be utilized by the researcher to maximize the potential of data gathered.

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative data is not always clear cut as they can overlap but social research tends to see these in contrasting terms. However, they are not in two entirely different camps, merely two different approaches which can have a major bearing upon our analysis of data. In simplistic terms qualitative data involves transcribing and recreating information gleaned from conversations and reports etc. into the written word whilst quantitative research measures phenomena into numerical form to aid analysis through statistical procedures. Qualitative research is well suited to dealing with individual action and behaviour as it helps to give a detailed description of events as experienced by the participants. In a small scale study such as this undertaking, qualitative research lends itself well whereas quantitative research is best suited to larger scale research dealing with larger numbers and greater quantity of information rather than small scale detail. I felt that depth of study was important within this research as much of the literature at this point in time is detailed but relates to the American educational system rather than our own and as such felt there was a gap here to be addressed. Detailed accounts of how far strategic change is sustainable in the minds of those responsible for leading our nation’s schools offers more “meat on the bones” than statistical measurement of many in broader terms.

Qualitative research does not focus on specific factors and variables in quite the same way as quantitative data as it looks at single individuals or very small groups and takes their context into account in identifying subjective meanings and interpretations. Both paradigms research at a detailed level but it is the type of data and the research objectives that determine the difference between them. The focus upon context is important to me within this research project as each school is unique and the strategies adopted are sustainable only when the leadership see the full context of all they are approaching.

“…realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts, nor can they be fragmented for separate study of their parts.” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.39)
As qualitative research is about the involvement of the researcher as a “measurement
device,” (Denscombe, 2003, p.234) there is not the “objective” numerical data and
precision that can be seen in quantitative research. Indeed the values, identity and
beliefs of the researcher can have a large bearing on the quality, type and
interpretation of qualitative data. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative data can
involve going through each stage several times with different sampling procedures
on each occasion if required. We can develop and test theory as part of the ongoing
process within qualitative research, we can adapt the questions within interview
situations or adjust the focus of the approach within observations, whereas within
quantitative research this flexibility is not open to the researcher to the same degree.
A quantitative researcher will know precisely how many questionnaires are to be
distributed, (although he will not know precisely how many will be returned and
under what conditions), but a qualitative researcher has the opportunity to adjust the
number of interviews and investigations undertaken to ensure that there is enough
information gleaned at the end of the process.

Qualitative approaches
Qualitative research is concerned with the meaning of human action and behaviour,
(although behaviour can also be measured within quantitative research) and people’s
understanding of the social complexities surrounding the situations they encounter. It
is also about the way the researcher interprets the information gleaned. By its very
nature qualitative research is about the way we use the data we collect.

“Qualitative research can be part of an information gathering exercise
and useful in its own right. Or, qualitative research can be used as a basis
for generating theories. In neither case, however, are its descriptions ever
“pure” – they are always the outcome of an interpretation by the
researchers.” (Denscombe, 2003, p.268)

Indeed, in qualitative research the research itself is about interpersonal social
interaction and as such the researcher can never be external. Consequently the
researchers’ interpretations are necessary; they are part of the process, but must be
accompanied by an explanation of the interpretation.

Case Studies: A case study approach is useful where the researcher wishes to focus
on one or two instances in detail rather than a broader field of research evidence and
discover aspects which would not have been possible by other means. It offers more
than a glimpse of the interconnections of relationships and processes and is able to delve deeper into how one part has an effect on others. It offers the opportunity to question why certain things happen and allows the researcher to use a variety of research tools and sources within the investigation.

"Case studies, in not having to seek frequencies of occurrences, can replace quantity with quality and intensity, separating the significant few from the insignificant many instances of behaviour. Significance rather than frequency is the hallmark of case studies, offering the researcher an insight into the real dynamics of situations and people." (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2003, p.185)

This approach studies things as they are without introducing any controls and allows the researcher to select the methods according to the nature of the investigation. The advantage of the Case Study approach is the possibility of using multiple sources of data helping to deal with the subtleties of relationships and complex social situations. This enables the researcher to validate data through the triangulation approach and is very useful to the small scale project as the data collection is concentrated in a single area. They also provide an insight into other similar situations and could help in the interpretation of other similar cases. However, I felt that although these attractions were positive factors, it would be difficult to demonstrate the extent to which any school situation I chose could be generalized to conclude that decisions drawn were significant in relation to sustainability in schools. It is also difficult to be 100% sure that any methods used would be totally “natural” as individuals may well behave differently when they are part of a single case study.

**Ethnography:** This approach refers to the study of cultures and groups and focuses upon understanding things from the point of view of those involved rather than from that of the observer but even here the subjective interpretation of the researcher is present. Although qualitative research may seek to understand the recipients' views the understanding will be through the eyes of the researcher. A different researcher could make a very different interpretation after analyzing the same transcripts data. Both could be equally logical and accurate yet seen through a different lens.

Ethnography produces a detailed view of events which in the ideographical view provides a stand alone platform without consideration of how representative that view may be. Consequently, there are some who hold the view that ethnographic
research provides detailed description of events as they really are while others maintain that ethnographic research should provide a way for testing theories on small scale scenarios. These are not mutually exclusive and many are prepared to admit that although there is a need to place the ethnography within a theoretical framework the approach does provide a very valuable source of data.

“The intention of the research is to create as vivid a reconstruction as possible of the culture or groups being studied.” (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, p.235)

The advantages of this approach are that there is no reliance on second hand data as it is based and “grounded” in empirical research. It can be used for testing theories and provides a depth of detail through direct contact with relevant situations which is useful when dealing with the subtleties of educational leadership. The method is good to see the ways in which a variety of individuals within one particular study perceive events and places a focus upon the relationships that are to be found beneath the surface.

The problems which arise in ethnographic study are due to the balance which has to be resolved between naturalism and reflexivity. There will be the opportunity for detailed accounts but at the same time there has to be some influence from the researcher given the nature of social relationships. Researchers must be aware of this and also work within a structured framework to ensure coherence and analytical study. As mentioned above, the fact that it is a system too limited in allowing generalization for a wider field of study inhibits the research aim and consequently led to alternative approaches being considered.

Grounded theory: The grounded theory approach was chosen for this small scale research project to use qualitative data for the study of how Head Teachers are facilitating strategic change in practice to achieve sustainable improvement in their schools. Glaser (1995) points out that grounded theory can mean slightly different things to different people through the interpretation and application in the research process. He believes that the researcher should develop the theory on the basis of empirical research and gradually build up general theories through analysis of the data. This approach emphasizes that we link any explanations very closely to the practical situations encountered and it is essential that the researcher undertakes the
investigation in schools themselves.

"...grounded theory tells us what is going on, tells us how to account for the participants' main concerns, and reveals access variables that allow for incremental change. Grounded theory is what is, not what should, could or ought to be." (Glaser, 1999, p.840)

The grounded theory approach involves the development of concepts and theories through a comparison and analysis of the ideas with existing data and building upon this knowledge to formulate new ideas. I determined to complete this research with an open mind, with a clear understanding of previous theory and research but without allowing this knowledge to prevent discovery of new factors of relevance in this investigation. Grounded theory within this investigation is based upon what Head Teachers in schools today are doing in practice and explanations drawn must make sense to those leading educational institutions forward. It is about real situations and sets out to describe how the participants work to create sustainable strategic change on the basis of how they see the situation within their schools.

The advantage of this approach for a small scale qualitative project is that it lends itself well to a variety of data collection methods and the focus upon pragmatic philosophy makes it suitable for undertaking research into what is happening in practice in schools today. As the explanations are "grounded" in real life situations, the theories developed can be built upon the knowledge gleaned from the empirical evidence.

Rationale for Grounded Theory Approach
The intention within this research is to adopt a grounded approach without working to the extremes of trying to work from a totally "new knowledge" point suggested by some, (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 and Strauss and Corbin, 1990), but instead accept that the literature review, previous theories and personal experience will influence the research to some degree and use the advantages of this within a semi-structured interview format. This previous knowledge was a starting point only and the concepts were intended to be provisional and guide the direction of the research as the project progressed.
The identified group was to be Head Teachers of secondary schools within a given geographical area but the starting point was to look at different sizes of schools to achieve a wide view on how leaders today are using strategic change to promote sustainable improvement. The initial ten sites (including two pilot studies) were decided on this basis with a view to choosing other subsequent sites based upon the ideas and scope prompted by these interviews as the criteria may well shift as different contexts are investigated.

Theoretical sampling then ensured that the Head Teachers and their schools were chosen for what they could contribute to this research as different concepts needed to be verified as the interviews progressed. Schools were consciously chosen for their size, character and the length of time a leader had been in post as it became evident after the pilot interviews that this too has a bearing on how an individual can approach the sustainability question. This process continued to investigate how far the new information confirmed the analysis until a point of “theoretical saturation” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.45) was reached and I felt that this was a representative spread of views across the given geographical area. Building upon the previous interviews in this way helped to create a sense of focus for the concepts which emerged and were refined through the grounded theory approach and all of the codes and categories were refined as the work progressed.

Leaders and their schools were chosen for their relevance to the project and although there was a degree of flexibility in being able to respond to data and build upon knowledge gleaned I followed a rigid rationale to ensure that choice was in no way random or left to chance. The selection criteria (Head Teachers of different sized schools, varying lengths of service and context) were clear and consistent with the emerging theory throughout the process. This proved to be very beneficial and allowed me to follow up on length of time in post and context of individual schools while at the same time retaining a systematic and credible selection approach.

Differing views on the precise nature of grounded theory have developed over the years and Denscombe, (2003, p.125) demonstrates how even the two originators, Glaser and Strauss, have perceived it in different ways. Glaser believes that the researcher should keep a distance from the data and allow a positivist outlook where the meaning emerges from neutral methodology whereas the Strauss view is for the
researcher to look for the meaning in an interpretivist way. Researchers have continued to adapt the approach to suit their needs and some approaches have branched off from grounded theory as identified by Goulding (2002).

For the purposes of this research I have ensured the grounded approach through:

- A clear topic of research within secondary schools throughout the process.
- An iterative process where data analysis has developed with constant reference to the research.
- Theoretical sampling
- Codes, concepts and categories were developed with constant reference to the data gleaned from semi-structured interviews.
- Explorative qualitative research with a focus on human interaction and leadership in secondary school settings.

3.2 Data Collection

I kept the above points on grounded theory in mind throughout the process in order to attempt to conduct the research in a detached manner as far as is possible without clouding events with personal prejudice. However, it is inevitable that the researcher’s beliefs and values, alongside the views formulated from the literature itself in order to formulate the focus of the questions, will play a large role in constructing and analyzing the qualitative data. Aware of this, I continued to analyse how far interpretation is swayed by personal opinion as the project progressed.

The advantage of using qualitative analysis for a project of this nature is that the descriptions and theories are “grounded” in reality. They come from real practice in schools and this qualitative approach facilitated data collection on the complex social situations and relationships which exist within and between schools in this changing climate of greater partnership and sharing of leadership. Quantitative analysis would perhaps have given a greater sense of solid and objective evidence but the qualitative approach is better to look at the subtle questions and complexities conveyed not just by the words spoken but also by the nuances of tone and body language. As Miles and Huberman, (1994, p.10) say of well collected qualitative data, “…focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what “real life” is like.”
Qualitative research offers the possibility of alternative explanations and interpretations being valid, it allows that there is no one “right” answer, it allows for the fact that each of the interviewees is different with experiences which differ in unique school situations and the fact that different researchers would come to different conclusions even if the same approach was adopted. I believe this is a strength of the approach rather than a weakness as we are dealing with complex situations and human objectivity in an attempt to reflect a view of the social reality which exists in practice.

The method is not without its problems though, as in a small scale investigation such as this, it can become difficult to determine how far the views formulated and interpreted from a very small sample of unique situations within a confined geographical location can be generalized to other schools of similar situations in a wider area. The context is a vital part of the qualitative data gleaned and it is important that the data is not changed through the categorizing and coding process and that there is no over generalization at the write up stage in order to exemplify the themes and areas of focus originally identified through the literature study. Equally, as social reality is a living entity I had to ensure that data that falls outside the anticipated response area is not lost.

Research Tools
The qualitative data approach was considered the best design for this type of study as I was setting out to derive information from events in real settings and in a local context to see the effect of the leadership of strategic change to enhance sustainability. As such the research is “Grounded” in the local situation of the school and I chose to use semi-structured interviews to collect the data as this method was useful in allowing me to incorporate both subjective and objective information and to demonstrate subjective meanings of events, processes and strategic change measures to enhance sustainable progress within schools. School Leadership by its very nature is integrated within socially dynamic contexts and is based upon negotiated social constructions. These semi-structured interviews provided a greater understanding of attitudes and feelings than quantitative data would allow and they gave a depth of detail and unique perception that could be more easily identified through this research method.
Semi-structured interviews allow interviewers and respondents to discuss their interpretations of strategic change and to express how they regard current developments from their own point of view. As such this is a very human process that not only concerns information transfer but also holds some bias that we need to remain aware of. Interviewers are human beings and their manner may have an effect upon respondents. Kitwood (1977) emphasizes that "each participant in an interview will define the situation in a particular way" and suggests that this can be aided by building a range of interviewers into the process with a range of different biases. This was not possible within a small-scale project and consequently I endeavoured to remain as aware of the potential problems both within the formulation of questions and in the final analysis. Bell (1987, p.73) states that it is "easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can creep in than to eliminate it altogether."

There are many different types of interview and Kvale (1996, pp.126 – 7) places these along a continua and argues that interviews differ in the open nature of their purpose, their degree of structure, the extent to which they are exploratory or testing a hypothesis and whether they seek interpretation. The degree of structure in the interview in itself can reflect the purpose. While the structured interview is useful when the researcher is aware of what they need to know and is able to frame questions to suit the given purpose; the unstructured interview is more useful when the interviewer is less sure of what is going on and has to rely on the interviewee response to make this clear. When we need to know unique, non-standard and personalized information the qualitative and open ended unstructured or semi-structured interview (as is chosen here) becomes more useful.

At one end of this continuum of formality there is a very formal approach where the interviewer keeps to the script without deviation while at the other end the completely informal interview is shaped by individual responses. When the interviewee responds freely, prompts may not be needed and unstructured interviews can produce a wealth of data. However, interviewing is a skill and is more than just an interesting conversation as is emphasized by Cohen (1976, p.82) in his analogy of interviewing to fishing:

"...like fishing, interviewing is an activity requiring careful preparation, much patience, and considerable practice if the eventual reward is to be a worthwhile catch."
Within this project it was important that the respondents had freedom to talk about the issues that are of central significance to themselves in sustaining strategic change but the loose structure devised also ensured that all topics which were considered crucial to the study were covered. The framework was established through the selected topics and allowed the respondents a degree of latitude to talk about the topic and give their views at the same time. It allowed me to probe further when necessary; to be more responsive to the answers given thereby allowing the conversation to flow freely from one topic to another. The order of the questions was changed according to the interviewee's responses and the questions were asked in different ways leaving me free to open up new avenues of exploration if replies led into interesting areas. This part of the study needed to be completed within a limited time frame and the established framework of the semi-structured interview aided analysis within the study.

The semi-structured format allowed the questioning to be more responsive to the answers given and to allow "deep meaning" to be construed. Within this structure questions were asked in more general ways when appropriate. Problems can be encountered in interviews; the respondent may adopt avoidance tactics if they are uncomfortable or if the questioning is too deep. Even when there is genuine attempt to communicate, many of the meanings which are clear to one party may well not be to another. The one common denominator of interviews is the transaction that takes place with one individual seeking information from another and I sought to ensure that respondents were comfortable with the questions, pace and style of approach throughout the process by taking careful note of interviewees' body language, apparent anxieties, tone and speed of response. (This meant that while most interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes, others using the same material varied from just 35 minutes to 95 minutes.)

Research authenticity and validity
There were several advantages of using semi-structured interviews within this project as they allowed me to ask questions with the possibility of adding prompts if required or of adding information if there was any misunderstanding on the part of the interviewee. This method gave greater understanding of attitudes and feelings than quantitative research and the depth of detail and unique perception of the educationalists interviewed is more easily identified through a qualitative approach.
The interview has both advantages and disadvantages in the direct interaction that takes place when used as part of the research technique. This method allowed for greater depth than would have been possible with other research methods yet at the same time it can be prone to subjectivity and bias from the interviewer. As a research tool, semi-structured interviews allowed more difficult and “open ended” questions to be addressed than a questionnaire approach and the respondents become more involved in the purpose of the research. The more open and “grounded” approach led to new avenues or questions in response to interviewee replies and this built further trust and understanding between both parties. In this way I was able to elicit information that would not be forthcoming in a more structured interview.

Qualitative researchers need to ascertain that their results are based upon a critical investigation of all their data and that it does not become “anecdotalism;”

“There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach in the use of data in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews...are used to produce evidence of a particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments are rarely expressed.” (Bryman, 1988, p.77)

In response to this fear, qualitative researchers have attempted to find qualitative equivalents to quantitative validity and reliability concepts. However, as Fielding and Fielding (1986, p.12) point out, some interpretation is always in evidence even when researchers are using hard quantitative measures. Silverman (2005, p.212) suggests five interrelated ways of thinking critically about qualitative data analysis to achieve more valid findings.

**The refutability principle.** In this approach researchers seek to refute their initial assumptions about their data in an attempt to gain greater objectivity. (However, our knowledge is always provisional and may change as further evidence becomes available.)

**The constant comparative method.** Researchers always attempt to find another case in this approach in order to test out a provisional hypothesis.

**Comprehensive data treatment.** Working with small data sets open to repeated
inspection, the researcher is able to apply every piece of relevant data that has been collected to any finding that is made.

**Deviant-case analysis.** This is about actively seeking out and addressing anomalies – every piece of data has to be used until it can be accounted for.

**Using appropriate tabulations.** Silverman points out that there is no reason why qualitative researchers should not use quantitative measures when it is appropriate. Simple counting measures can sometimes allow researchers to test and to revise their findings in a different light.

At the design stage I took several steps to ensure the validity of the research:

- The time scale of the research was carefully considered to allow a fair degree of consistency on things that are happening now in education by completing all within a six month period. Interviews were spaced approximately two weeks apart to allow time for transcription and building upon ideas between interviews to continue in a “grounded” theory approach. Adequate time within the interviews themselves was ensured to ascertain all important points and probe respondents’ thoughts on sustaining improvement.
- Few resources were needed and appropriate steps were taken to ensure that all appointments were made in advance and suitable recording hardware was available.
- The methodology was carefully considered to ascertain the best approach to answer the research questions and respondents carefully selected to elicit sufficient material to draw valid conclusions. This grounded method of research allowed me to start with a minimum number of six and continue the process until I was happy that the research had provided the information required.
- The questions were focused upon the points gleaned from previous research and leading questions avoided to elicit accurate, relevant and comprehensive data.

At the data analysis and reporting stage the five interrelated ways of thinking critically about qualitative data analysis suggested by Silverman (2005), were considered throughout and the following procedures were adopted:

- Respondents were provided with transcripts and comments sought to ensure validity.
• Comprehensive data treatment and the recognition that the different contexts and situations each Head Teacher encounters will have a bearing on the data provided.

• Careful coding of the qualitative data to cover the points required and opportunities for simple counting techniques available where appropriate.

• Avoidance of generalization and inference in writing up the analysis. Evidence based comment was sought throughout.

• Ensured that transcripts are an accurate record and representation of discussions undertaken.

To maintain the reliability and validity of the research I ensured that the criteria for the selection of respondents was clearly identified and that questions offered consistency of approach. While recognizing that my own views and previous reading would have an influence on conclusions drawn, I made deliberate moves to ensure that the findings make all sides clear, aligning comments to previous research and ensuring clear and consistent aims for the research throughout the process. All transcripts and findings were forwarded to respondents for their perusal and comment where desired to ensure that conclusions drawn are a fair and accurate representation of discussions. The body of the analysis draws the conclusions made together with existing literature, (Hill, 2006; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves, 2006) to further validate decisions reached with other comparable situations.

3.3 Reliability of the Research
Within this qualitative research I have sought to record Head Teachers' comments on what is happening in practice in education today and record the different interpretations given by the respondents to situations happening in their schools. I did use respondent validation but as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) point out, these individuals are not in the position to be sole commentators on their actions. Reliability within this research is about reflecting the real life situations for sustainable strategic change, with a clear identification of context, authenticity, detail, honesty and depth of response which is meaningful both to the interviewee and any external party encountering the research.

Lee (1993) and Scheurich (1995) point out that gender, race, status, social class and age in certain contexts can be sources of bias for interviewers. Within these
interviews as all respondents were of the same status and I ensured that both genders were included in the sample. Hitchcock and Hughes suggest that because interviews are about face to face interaction with other human beings it is inevitable that the researcher will have some influence on the respondent. I minimized any such effect of “transference” (Scheurich, 1995) by ensuring that each interview was undertaken in surroundings familiar to the respondent and retained a neutral perspective within each context. Where issues became sensitive I ensured that probes were minimal but listened to the respondent to ascertain as much information as they were prepared to give. However, research is a social interaction which in itself can create new meanings and interpretations for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Limited time, limited resources and an awareness of the busy lives and goodwill of the interviewees prevent re-interviewing in this research to see if external or internal factors create new meaning. The responses and data are taken as the most reliable evidence and explanation provided on the interpretation made.

Oppenheim (1992) suggests that changes in context and wording of questions undermines reliability as it can create a completely different question and I kept this in mind throughout the process but felt that more was to be gained from the semi-structured approach which allowed greater freedom to explore issues and promote a feeling of trust and sincerity rather than adopting a very tight structure. The interviewer can improve the reliability of the data by careful piloting, inter-related reliability through the coding process and the use of closed questions. I did use the pilot interviews to establish the grounded approach and focus upon how to ensure greater validity and reliability of the data gleaned but I found that Silverman’s (2005) approach to the open-ended interview helped respondents to portray their own unique situation, context and view on sustainable improvement. The interview is a shared experience and has a life of its own. Each situation and relationship between interviewer and interviewee is unique and I found that the power balance within these situations was fluid and constructed within the body of the interview rather than anything preordained by the status and position of any individual.

The criteria for an effective interviewer are identified by Kvale, (1996, pp.148 – 149) as:

"knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering (by recalling earlier statements and relating to them during the interview), and interpreting."
The clear structure and background knowledge did allow me to be open and interpretative within this research and I found that recall and steering of the conversation was more necessary in some situations than in others. For me, the reliability and validity of this research lies in its ability to record and represent the respondents’ subjective realities in their context in relation to what head teachers are doing to create sustainable strategic change in their schools.

Selection of schools and research interviewees

Leaders embark upon the journey of Sustainable Strategy from many different starting points. Every school has its own history, culture, ethos and I was interested to discover how the Head Teachers in the study interpret their own experiences to lend to the bigger picture. Some leaders have supportive situations, resources and partnerships to sustain the improvement process from the outset while others will need to incorporate strategic energies on creating the supportive conditions to enhance the outcomes over time. Some are relatively new to their schools while others are more settled but for each the goal of sustaining improvement is challenging in its own way.

Variation sampling ensured:

- Schools were drawn from a range of economic settings to include rural, urban and mixed catchment areas.
- They were of different sizes. (50% < 500 pupils and 50% > 500 pupils)
- Four were Grammar Schools; six were Comprehensives (3x11-16 and 3x 11-18) and there was one bi-lateral School.
- A range of Head Teacher experience in their current post was identified. (50% < 4 years and 50%> 4 years.)

In order to research strategy and sustainability this investigation focuses on the key areas discussed within the literature studied with a view to establishing the deeper meaning of sustainability and how the leaders interpret interrelated principles of sustaining leadership;

- Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership
- Concepts of Strategic Change
- Concepts of Sustainability
- Developing a strategic role in others to make strategic change sustainable
These elements are built around the principles of sustainability in educational change identified in the review of the literature and the interview questions sought to tease out Head Teachers’ views on what makes leadership sustainable using these principles as a focus for the questions. This is a qualitative study which investigates the ways in which Head Teachers demonstrate strategic approaches to elicit sustainable change within their organisation.

The investigation looks at ways in which the role of Head Teacher demands both leadership and management skills; dealing with vision, expectations, standards and relationships both in internal and external settings to sustain improvement and create the right conditions for all within the School community to flourish. Heads are responsible for the evolving school context and the challenging developments that they encounter both at a macro and a micro level. The semi-structured interviews are designed to allow the research to reflect the thoughts and feelings of participants and as such create an interpretative mode of research dealing with the subjective reality of the leaders in their own individual organisations.

I identified 10 possible interview respondents from schools within a 25 mile radius using the criteria named above to ensure consistency of approach while at the same time allowing a degree of flexibility of the precise number of interviews that would elicit sufficient information to reach saturation of the research.

(Pilot) School 1: Type 11 – 16 Comprehensive
Less than 500 students on roll
Head Teacher in post 4+ years

(Pilot) School 2: Type 11 – 18 Grammar
More than 500 students on roll
Head Teacher in post -4 years

School 3: Type 11- 16 Bi-lateral
Less than 500 students on roll
Head Teacher in post -4 years

School 4: Type 11 – 18 Comprehensive
More than 500 students on roll
Head Teacher in post 4+ years

School 5: Type 11 – 18 Comprehensive
Less than 500 students on roll
Head Teacher in post 4+ years
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Type</th>
<th>Students on Roll</th>
<th>Head Teacher in Post</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Type 11 - 16 Comprehensive</td>
<td>Less than 500</td>
<td>-4 years</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>students on roll</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>Type 11 – 16 Comprehensive</td>
<td>More than 500</td>
<td>4+ years</td>
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<td>students on roll</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>Type 11 – 18 Grammar</td>
<td>More than 500</td>
<td>4+ years</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>Type 11 – 18 Grammar</td>
<td>Less than 500</td>
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<td>School 10</td>
<td>Type 11 – 18 Grammar</td>
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**Pilot Interviews:**

Two pilot schools were selected in order to ascertain areas within the approach which needed to be refined. They were chosen on the basis of their differing sizes, catchment and the length of time the Head Teacher had been in post. (The first pilot interview was with a male head who has been in post more than four years in a rural 11 – 16 school with less than 500 students. This was followed with a second pilot interview with a female Head of an 11 – 18 school and with more than 500 students in an urban location, who had been in post less than 4 years. The intention was to continue, after adapting in line with findings from the pilot research, with a sample of up to ten interviews with Lincolnshire secondary school Head Teachers. I sought to provide a “grounded” approach, building upon information gleaned as the interview procedure developed. Respondents were selected bearing in mind, “…the interviewer must ensure that the interviewees selected will be able to furnish the researcher with the information required.” Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.278)

I learned a great deal from the first interviews on several fronts. As both schools were known to me, I was aware of the context and aware that both had external pressures in their recent history. However, I had not really digested how far the impact on sustainability could be an issue through two very poignant external events, which were outside the control of the Head Teacher.
One of these was a very sad event which had hit the national headlines and I had no intention of mentioning the incident; yet I found that by asking the right questions (sometimes digressing from those in front of me) and listening with empathy and genuine interest on the topic of sustainability, the information provided was a natural link to how this individual school and the staff/leaders within had been affected.

Having had a tour of the School with the Head of the first school, addressed the ethics letter and done the requisite signing of forms I began with an outline context of what I was setting out to discover and why. This was a far better way than beginning with my original first question as it gave me time to establish a clear rapport with each individual and gave some “meat” to the bones of the subject. (However, although that was good, I didn’t set the tape running early enough in the first pilot interview. I intended to do this after my explanation but the head was very knowledgeable in this field of study and went straight into a reply. I started the tape as soon as I realised we were in but we got to that point much quicker than I had anticipated.)

The semi-structured format gave me a focus to ensure that all areas were covered but at the same time allowed a fair degree of movement of the order to ensure a natural flow to these pilot conversations. The first one particularly, felt just that - a very interesting conversation on sustainability with a smooth flowing interjection of ideas from both sides. The learning point from these interviews was to avoid commenting too soon and to avoid asking questions that would spoil the flow.

The questions themselves addressed all the major points from the literature and the tone was adapted to fit each individual and school situation. There was a variation in order and content as lessons were learned from one interview to the next and ideas refined as the research progressed.

**Semi-structured interviews:**

This research aims to contribute to the knowledge and information available on sustainable change through a synthesis of theoretical perspectives and new evidence from practical situations gleaned through interviews studied. It allowed value to be given to the words and experiences of those closest to these complex leadership
challenges and promoted discussion of opportunities to create the right conditions for sustainable strategic change.

Questions were defined to incorporate senior leaders' views on how they embed change and consider whether it has made them reflect on the way they do things. I set out to establish the impact of new initiatives on the leadership of schools and the strategic approaches of senior staff in leading schools through periods of change. There were four main factors on sustaining strategic change that needed to be considered when deciding upon the questions to be addressed during the interviews:

1. The formal role of the individuals, their background and how they see their part in the process.
2. How individuals feel that strategic approaches can be utilised to maximise opportunities in periods of change.
3. Investigation into the ways that Head Teachers build strategic competencies within their schools.
4. What individuals are doing to preserve and sustain all that is good in their schools.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the depth of detail required to establish the feelings and beliefs of the key individuals selected for this project. The outline interview schedule identified below allowed a fair degree of flexibility for the conversation to move in the most useful direction with the given individuals while at the same time creating a structured framework to ensure that major points are covered. Questions were not always asked in the given order but the structure created a base plan to keep the discussion moving in the right direction while allowing flexibility and freedom of response to elicit the truth required within this very subjective topic.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Once the research objectives were identified, a basic framework of ten general questions (outlined below) was devised. This kept the focus of the conversation to the issues raised by the literature in terms of looking at how individuals see their role, initiatives that are currently being introduced and structures that would help to sustain strategic change within the selected schools. (These also became the focus for
the coding system to aid analysis later.) The questions were not strictly adhered to in
their given order as sometimes questions were covered earlier through previous
answers and the conversation led on to other equally relevant points. Prompts
allowed greater clarification of points raised and probes were helpful in eliciting a
greater depth of response and honesty from the respondents as identified by Patton
(1980, p.238). The following areas were covered by all respondents, notes were
taken; the conversations taped; the responses were transcribed immediately and
copies were provided for the interviewees to verify.

Following an outline interview guide allowed a fair degree of flexibility for the
conversation to move in the most useful direction with each individual, while at the
same time creating a structured framework to ensure that major points were covered.
Respondents were interviewed on how they saw their role within the change process.
Within this framework, questions were specifically related to theoretical concepts
from literature reviewed and knowledge gleaned from previous interviews as the
research progressed but were flexible enough to allow points to be taken up and
extended.

The format chosen allowed greater freedom than a basic questionnaire or structured
interview as colleagues were able to voice their feelings and responses were probed
in order to obtain relevant data. The interviews lasted approximately 45 – 60 minutes
and were focused around the School in which the participants work. The questions
were flexible enough to allow individual responses directly related to the
interviewee’s personal experience and expertise. Interviews were recorded and
transcripts made. These were then analysed using a coded system (recorded on page
68) and confidentiality of sensitive material respected.
Interview Guide

1. What does the term “strategic sustainability” mean to you within your role as Head Teacher of ................. School?

2. Strategic leadership by its very nature is looking towards the future. Which of the strategic initiatives that you have introduced here do you believe are most sustainable? Why? – What is the magic ingredient for you?

3. Change is the one constant we can be sure of within School Leadership. How do you deal with change? (Strategic processes, Conceptualising, Implementing, Strategic conversations.)

4. Has dealing with change made you reflect on the way you do things?

5. How do you secure commitment to longer term strategy while at the same time achieving shorter term goals?

6. What do you feel are the best ways to embed strategic approaches to make change sustainable?

7. How do you build strategic competencies within the school?

8. Can you tell me about the ways you develop and enhance this strategic leadership in others?

9. What have you found to be the best measures of success for strategic leadership within the School? How do you monitor the success of strategic change within the school?

10. Some of the current research suggests that Head Teachers find various networks a good way to create greater sustainability. What are your experiences of working with other schools and agencies to share good practice and promote sustainable change?

The interviews are numbered Interview 1, Interview 2 etc. for ease of reference throughout the project. The responses of the interviewees provide different perspectives on several fronts, as they give an interesting account of different approaches to leadership roles in taking initiatives forward. They each have different experiences and skills in the educational process and are able to focus upon the issues which are hitting secondary sector leaders in several different contexts within
a single geographical area at the present time. This combination of skills, experience and perspective enabled a certain amount of crosschecking of the information obtained and gave a more rounded picture than a focus purely on a single type of establishment would have allowed. Using semi-structured interviews in this way provided evidence of leadership approaches, action and tasks performed and a fresh insight into individual perspectives on the impact national and local change initiatives are having on strategic sustainability.

Research Protocol
Participants completed the consent form outlined by the IFL Ethics Committee and clear details were provided to ensure that all are fully aware of the purpose of the research. Confidentiality has been respected at all times and pseudonyms provided for each individual and institution throughout the writing of the thesis.

There was no risk anticipated for participants in taking part in these interviews. The questions were defined to incorporate senior leaders' views on how they embed change and consider whether it has made them reflect on the way they do things.

All participants were forwarded a transcript and a synopsis of the information gleaned from their interview.

The prompts allowed questions to be clarified which although not always used were sometimes extended into further probing questions when answers needed to be elaborated upon or extended. By establishing a framework in this way yet giving respondents the opportunity to talk about their feelings and attitudes, a certain degree of latitude was provided as the conversation could move freely from one topic to another. (This was not always easy to deal with as an interviewer but it did help to create a better rapport and felt like genuine response from the soul of the respondent.) The framework was also useful as it kept the conversation on the right lines and ensured that the information provided was relevant to the topic under consideration while allowing a coded analysis system to be created.

"Data analysis...ought properly to be considered alongside the choice of response mode so that the interviewer can be confident that the data will serve her purposes and analysis of them can be duly prepared." (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2003, p.278)
The code was decided upon while devising the outline structure of questions for the interview to ensure that the issues discussed were pertinent to the research objectives. It was framed around three main areas and each of these areas was further subdivided to reflect responses to the areas under investigation.

**Sustainable Strategic Change - Coding System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategic Leadership/Clear Moral Purpose:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L/dp</td>
<td>Developing People</td>
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<tr>
<td>L/students</td>
<td>Leading the learning of students</td>
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<tr>
<td>L/reflect</td>
<td>Reflection and feelings on role</td>
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<td>L/future</td>
<td>Futures perspective/long term view</td>
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<td>L/thinking</td>
<td>Strategic thinking about role</td>
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<td>L/sp</td>
<td>Strategic processes</td>
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<td>L/align</td>
<td>Linking individuals with sustainable strategic direction</td>
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<td>L/ssv</td>
<td>Shared strategic vision</td>
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<th><strong>Strategic Change Initiatives:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>I/T</td>
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<td>I/e</td>
<td>Effect on sustaining improvement</td>
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<td>I/students</td>
<td>Sustainable effect on students' learning</td>
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<td>I/reflect/sustain</td>
<td>Reflection and feelings on effectiveness for sustainable improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>I/frust</td>
<td>Frustrations</td>
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<th><strong>Sustainability and Strategic Context:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>SC/e</td>
<td>Effect on sustaining improvement</td>
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<td>SC/reflect/sustain</td>
<td>Reflections on contextual aspects</td>
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<td>SC/frust</td>
<td>Contextual frustrations</td>
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<td>SC/long term</td>
<td>5 - 10 years</td>
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<td>SC/med term</td>
<td>2 -5 years</td>
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<td>SC/short term</td>
<td>1 year</td>
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3.4 Observations on the semi-structured interview process

Interviews are a social encounter and I found that the greater the time available at the beginning of the interviews to allow the respondent to "settle" the more respondents appeared to feel confident in the situation.

I found the best responses came when the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to add prompts building upon the response given and thus eliciting new information in a direction I had not previously considered. (See Appendix 1, Interview 1, Question 4) Body language and frequent nodding and smiling also helped respondents to feel at ease and encouraged them that they were providing the "type" of information that was required. Their confidence needed boosting at times to elicit the best and most honest response and the interactive and emotional aspects of the interview should not be underestimated. The active listening skill is something I do in my daily role but the interview situation demands so much more. I worked on keeping the "flow" of questions logical and pertinent to my purpose and was fortunate in my first choice of pilot respondents in that both, although very different, made this an enjoyable learning experience in educational research. The success of the interviews is down to the individuals who are experienced professionals who were prepared to give me the information I needed to know and the interview was kept on schedule by clear intention of purpose and verbal murmurings of encouragement where it was appropriate.

Some wording of questions was changed from the basic interview schedule of the pilot questions to ensure that no question was too directly related to events that the
respondents would in reality know little about. Clarity in questioning is important and must be within the frame of reference of the respondent to ensure that the information gleaned is relevant, honest and reflective. Exchanging Question 2 in this interview for a more pertinent topical approach later, helped to maintain the integrity of the whole interview. These early questions must put interviewees at their ease and consequently the interview began with the non-controversial question on role and followed with the more searching questions later.

I followed Field and Morse (1989) guidance on anticipating and preventing problems that can arise within the interview. Minimising distractions by taking the telephone off the hook, choosing a time when there would be no interruptions, and avoiding jumping from one topic to another all helped to gather the information I sought. On some occasions the questions were shortened even further as the answers were spontaneous and relevant, providing rich content specific data that served to answer my questions before I even got there! I realise this will not always be the case, but as a learning experience it helped in formatting ideas and following through points made with the minimum of fuss and disruption to the schedule.

Taping the interviews was very helpful for transcription and analysis purposes and it was interesting to see how each of the respondents reacted differently to the very small recorder. All agreed with this method when they agreed to be interviewed yet respondent 1 seemed to “forget” it was there for the duration of the interview whereas respondent 3 was very conscious of the recording equipment and requested it was turned off at certain points in the interview. However, transcriptions are not an indication of everything that took place in an interview. Nods of a head, smiles and other body language along with tones of voice can all help to create meaning to ensure a fairer record of the interaction. Yet even here the statements are as Kvale (1996, p.183) suggests, co-authored by the interviewer.

The coded analysis helped to give a structure to the qualitative data collected. By their nature semi-structured interviews are interpretative as they represent a social encounter that took place. Separating this interview structure into a coded system that is straightforward to analyse is helpful for the analysis but in order to avoid losing the meaning of the “whole” the following stages were followed as identified by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003, p.282):
1. Generating natural units of meaning
2. Classifying these units
3. Structuring a narrative to describe the interview contents
4. Interpreting the interview data

By using this method, codes were identified very early in the process and refined as the analysis got underway. This ensured that all were very pertinent to the questions addressed but also allowed flexibility in removing those that were superfluous to the analysis in question.

Conclusion
This method of using semi-structured interviews proved to be the most effective way to investigate educational leaders’ responses to strategic educational change and the ways we can help to enhance sustainability for learning within schools. It provided the information to explore the reactions of ten senior leaders to different aspects of educational leadership and elicited research on how these individuals see their role in sustaining strategic change in practice. The probing of their understanding of how strategic change in schools is used to enhance sustainability, through a range of questions and the concrete examples they provided, has created a good framework for cross checking information. Several main issues have emerged as a result of these deliberations that are important in how we understand and lead change initiatives to promote sustainability and the findings in the analysis (Chapter 4) will be discussed through the elements identified in the literature review.
Chapter 4
Discussion of Findings

Introduction:
The review of the literature identified four key elements for researching "Sustainable strategic change in practice" and these elements form the structure for the discussion of the data.

4.1 Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership.

4.2 Strategic Change.

4.3 Sustainability and Strategic Context.

4.4 Developing People to make Strategic Change Sustainable.

Discussion is based around the views of the Head Teachers interviewed for this research in each of the areas referred to above. It is inevitable that there are links between each of these areas as the interviews were set up to elicit responses that provided a framework for analysis of "sustainable strategic change." The aim was to determine views on how these elements merge and consequently although the headings provide a structure to the investigation there are occasions when there is an overlap between these sections due to the close relationship of the four themes under consideration.

The discussion begins with the views and definitions of Head Teachers on strategy and their reflections and thoughts on strategic leadership in their schools today. This is followed by a section looking at the structures and systems from both within and outside schools that play a part in strategic change initiatives undertaken by these Head Teachers, before moving on to a section on sustainability and the influence of the strategic context on the leadership within. The final heading looks at developing a strategic role in others to involve staff in the change process and enhance opportunities to sustain improvement. My conclusion to this chapter draws upon facets of sustainable strategic change and reflections are based upon the elements suggested at the end of the literature review. It identifies the main factors which have
held influence on sustaining strategic improvement in the experience of these ten Head Teachers leading secondary schools at the present time.

4.1 Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership

Head Teachers' definitions of strategy and strategic leadership demonstrate that they consider a clear vision and a view of the future direction of the school to be a vital element in securing strategic thinking and effective practice. Throughout all of the interviews undertaken, Head Teachers reflected upon the context of their school and attempted to set direction and create a structure that looks to the future.

"We make decisions now which we hope are going to prepare the school for the future... We are preparing for an unknown future – we are doing a best guess and a best fit.” (Head 2)

“At this school it means a strategy that is going to work not only in the short term but in the long term. In this particular school, it means a strategy that has a fairly immediate impact because of the scale of the problems, and I suppose because of the short time I have to turn things around... So my sustainable strategies are not only to get us through now, but through the long term too.” (Head 3)

“As a small school, perhaps not with a reliable source of numbers on roll, every development that you put forward in the school, if it's got a financial cost, which most have, has to be thought about very carefully in terms of whether it's going to be something that goes through to the future.” (Head 1)

The context of each school has a major impact upon the leaders' concept of strategy and the strategic decisions made by individual school Head Teachers. Although each of these school leaders refer to the long term future it is apparent through the interview transcripts that this means different things to each according to their individual situation. Schools 2 and 3 have new Head Teachers recently appointed with the task set to get their schools out of difficult circumstances. Both schools had regular monitoring visits from HMI in the early days of their new appointment and this appears to have influenced the short term actions undertaken. However, keeping an eye on the future strategy means different things to each of these school leaders in building strategy around the current context.
Alongside the concept of strategy being about the future direction of the School, Heads 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 linked it to setting the direction and having a clear vision;

"...if you can think strategically, then you can make decisions which will take you towards your vision. So you need to have a clear vision. Some of that will be immediate decisions about what is going to happen in the next five minutes, and some of them will be longer term. Basically it is about maintaining that vision and making sure that you can go in that direction." (Head 4)

However, although the Head Teachers interviewed all saw strategic leadership as being about setting direction and many articulated it as being about having a clear vision, not all referred to a long term plan directly in their definition of strategy.

"As far as I'm concerned strategy is about game plan. It's about knowing where we want to take a school. It's about school direction. And it's about making sure that we have direction and that we stick to it, and that we don't waiver from it. So to me strategic sustainability is about direction that very much stays on course." (Head 6)

Head Teacher 7 also expressed the view that strategy is about school direction but the view of this leader was different to all of the others in that an emphasis was made on the fact that in some circumstances it is difficult to define the long term picture and that at School 7 they had been reactive rather than strategic;

"I don't think we have planned in any way, shape or form, so I think we have reacted to events and to change rather than to try and foresee them. We have made a number of changes - to the curriculum and the way the school looks, we have made some changes to teaching and learning, and assessments and target setting, we've made some changes to uniform. All the sort of things you'd expect people to do. But in terms of the long term structure I'm not sure." (Head 7)

Most of the Head Teachers interviewed however, referred to a plan of some description and although this plan took as many different forms as the interviews themselves took direction, some identified it as planning for an uncertain future (Heads 2, 7, 8), whilst others were keen to emphasise that strategy means having a very clear picture of the future (Heads 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10).
"I think the strategy is the overall game plan. The ideas of having some plan for where you are going...It’s not getting bogged down in detail. That’s the difference to me between a strategic plan and an everyday plan.” (Head 10)

Strategic thinking is a term that is sometimes used in the wrong context when people are merely referring to it as “planning for something” and several of the Head Teachers acknowledged that the term has a far more subtle nuance, with strategic thinking being a key part of pushing schools forward in their vision.

"Initial strategy, although not rocket science, was hardly an imaginative agenda. A lot of the strategy was based around trying to be more rigorous, trying to be more organised and sadly that had to be driven from the top. It was very much a top down agenda. It was necessary, to drive it. It is not a sustainable strategy to go year on year, to say next year we are going to work even harder.” (Head 5)

“I think strategic thinking is over used at the minute and people bandy it around, when actually they just mean they are planning for something. It’s more subtle that that.” (Head 4)

The literature review, (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2006, p. 8) established that there is a common misunderstanding among school leaders to believe that strategy can be achieved by merely adding a year or two to the operational plan. It is inevitable that the stages do blend into each other but some Head Teachers (4, 5 and 9) articulated that they saw strategy as a longer term 3 – 5 year view and a futures perspective as further into the future.

“I have strategic intent in what I see is our medium term planning, in the three to five year period. We review after that period. So I would feel that the sustainability is sustaining that vision, and sustaining our ability to actually achieve those intents.” (Head 9)

Quality communication and sharing the vision with enthusiasm and conviction was identified in the literature review (Cheng, 2002, p.526 and Boal and Hooijberg, 2001, p.526) as key elements of strategic leadership. This is supported by the evidence within the interviews where Heads 1, 4, 5, 7 and 9, articulated that making it clear to people why they are doing what they are is an important part of their role as school leader.
"If you retain an air of optimism and you do retain a sense of where the school might develop to, you can take people with you. People will subscribe – to varying degrees.” (Head 5)

Heads 2, 3, 6, 8 and 9 also stressed the importance of sharing the vision but they focused on intelligent accountability and emphasised that they themselves wouldn’t sign up to anything if it was not clearly for the good of the school.

"The bottom line from my point of view is that the learner is at the centre of everything we do.” (Head 2)

“I think the first thing that I have done is to decide what needs to be done and what is desirable. And again, because of the situation I am in, the desirables are on the back burner...So yes, change, but depending on the circumstances, change for what sake. And I think we have to prioritise and the biggest changes we’re making are in teaching and learning, and the rest …which I would like to do, have been shelved. I think looking at changes, deciding what can be done and whether it needs whole school planning. If it doesn’t – don’t do it.” (Head 3)

These Head Teachers, (2 and 3) are under pressure to achieve short term targets quickly due to the particular circumstances of each being subject to external scrutiny by HMI which may in itself have repercussions on the strategy adopted. However, all Heads interviewed, regardless of circumstances, believed that it is important that leaders have the strength, awareness and confidence to identify strategic initiatives that are pertinent to their establishment (albeit in different ways) and adapt or refine others to fit their individual schools’ needs.

"My approach to the plethora of government initiatives is being extremely selective in how they’re used.” (Head 8)

“I think one of the key skills and qualities of being a school leader is knowing what change or what initiative to run with and what initiative to put in the bin. In terms of dealing with and managing the change, I think that is the first priority about knowing what is a priority for your school and what to keep at arms length, because schools can’t take on everything and its very much about being selective and knowing what will work and what has a chance of working in your school and in your context. And if it doesn’t – then being strong enough to say no.” (Head 6)

For Head Teacher 9 it is important to choose what is right for the school but to avoid fighting unnecessarily. Time and energy are important commodities for school leaders and this Head Teacher believes it is important to work with the
benefits rather than try to change what can’t be changed and to make sure that a positive slant is put on what needs to be done in order to “sell” the ideas to staff.

“Looking at first at what the benefits of change are. If at first I don’t like the direction that the DfES are pushing us in, then trying to work round it so that it doesn’t become a major issue for us. So all the time trying to star the positive side and trying to lower its status if I don’t genuinely feel it is going to benefit the school. So working around it if I’m dubious about it, although selling the benefits to the staff.” (Head 9)

Head Teacher 7 also emphasised that initiatives the school had undertaken were all directly linked to improving the life chances for the students within but that the school has not changed systems just because of government imposed initiatives.

“So, I don’t think that we have gone against common sense, because we’ve implemented what the unions want in terms of TLRs and remodelling. We have introduced different courses which have been interesting to teach. We have supported kids through target-setting, which is educationally robust. So there has been nothing that I think has gone down like a lead balloon. The only thing we did think through was the vertical pastoral system, which staff didn’t want and set up the barricades, so we didn’t do it.” (Head 7)

Leaders need to make sure that people are involved in strategic thinking and strategic decisions themselves to ensure success. The ways in which this has been addressed varies from Head to Head and School to School depending upon leadership approach and existing structures for each establishment.

“I do try to engage in conversation about how we see the future of the school and I make lots of opportunities both formally and informally to get staff engaged in discussions about where all this is leading. I don’t see any alternative but to communicate well with staff to get them on board.” (Head 5)

“But in terms of school direction, I always talk to the governors about things, and I always talk to the staff about things. Then I go and talk to the students about things. If you are going to have strategy and direction, it’s about making sure that all of those stakeholders take part in that.” (Head 6)

As seen in the quotations above, Head Teachers attempt to ensure that there is an element of stakeholder involvement in strategic decisions made but as school leaders carry the ultimate responsibility for making things work, this is often about consultative leadership rather than direct sharing of the decision making process.
"We do have a vision and we do have a long term strategy. I do take notice of other people’s long term visions and strategy and to a certain extent there comes a point that you have to be quite clear about what it is that you are trying to do. You need to share it with as many people as you can and get them on board." (Head 8)

Interviews with Head Teachers 1, 4, 5, 8 and 9 made it clear that a key element of strategic leadership is based upon creating a more autonomous approach within their schools where the middle leaders are able to take on a more significant and more ostensible role in driving up standards in the current educational climate.

"Part of the sustainability will also come from people being involved in strategic thinking and strategic decisions themselves. I don’t like to fight for ownership, if people are involved in the thing and committed to it you shouldn’t need to have to worry about their name on the project.” (Head 4)

“I think by offering people opportunities at a very young age. Giving them some responsibility and supporting them. I think through coaching, both with colleagues coaching, and coaching at Middle Leadership level and Senior Leadership level, and sharing good practice at meetings and so on. A lot of it is supporting people with ability and developing those confidences.” (Head 9)

A key tool Head Teachers 1, 4 and 8 have deliberately set up has been to form a positive group of people who are a decision making or consultative group on the staff to sustain strategic initiatives;

“So what I’ve done is I’ve deliberately formed a group of positive (not necessarily people who agree with me) but positive people who are a decision making or consultative group on the staff. I think in terms of sustainability that is a very, very big issue.” (Head 1)

“There is terrific strength in teamwork, and if you’re planning something significant, and reviewing something you’ve done – when you’ve got a strong team to share views and disagree sometimes, and come to a consensus on most occasions – that is very powerful.” (Head 8)

Head Teacher 4 emphasised that strategy is about sharing the leadership and working with people to help them to see that strategy is not just about planning. Written plans alone do not necessarily mean that a leader is thinking strategically and consequently at School 4 the senior team worked together to look at how various strategy fits in with vision, planning and day to day operations. As a result they are sharing that
practice and have found a system and a structure that works for the school. "And it's about sharing that view on the senior team and then beyond to middle managers, so that everyone can be involved in it." (Head 4)

In School 6, the school development plan has been written around the "Every Child Matters" outcomes and the Head of that school makes sure that each curriculum area makes some contribution to one of those outcomes. This creates an alignment across the school and that breeds a familiarity with school direction;

"It breeds a loyalty to the cause, as it were. So I am utterly transparent and I often talk to staff about these kinds of things and it is really about having an awareness of where we want to be in three years time. There's the plan, that's what is going to get us there, and that's what we do." (Head 6)

Others, (Heads 2 and 3) have created groups or organised whole staff to work on a future thinking exercise that Head Teachers believed led staff into thinking strategically for themselves, sharing local and political views before embarking on the core issues of whether the school is challenging the students enough and courses that should be offered in the future.

"We had a meeting back in early March and we had a future thinking exercise. There was the Senior Leadership Team, the learning leaders for the three key stages and the subject leaders all in the conference room. The question was What do you think is out there waiting for us in 10 years? How do you think society is going to change? What's going to change in this area?" (Head 2)

"...what we try to do is match jobs to skills and we have moved away from the Head of Year system...I think a sign of success would be the number of people who have bought into and stayed with the plan and that's been increasing." (Head 3)

Linking individuals with the identified sustainable strategic direction has played a large part in the strategic approaches of several of the Head Teachers interviewed (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8) and this is evident in new roles created for non-teachers, such as setting up a gifted and able co-ordinator (School 1) through the workforce remodelling process. Others have looked at leaders at every level in the school and knowing their strengths and weaknesses, given them opportunity to develop strategic
processes (Schools 2, 4 and 7). The Head Teachers interviewed consider that these individuals create opportunities to maximise the sustainability of strategic initiatives.

The differences seen between the leadership approaches of these leaders in linking individuals to the strategic direction centres upon who, where and how this takes place. Although for some (Schools 1, 2, 4, 7 and 9) the main focus has been across the school, for others (Schools 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10) the benefits have evolved from increasing the capacity of the senior leadership team to drive forward strategic aims.

"One of the things that has been successful in the core group of Head, Deputy and Assistant Head, was that we had a complimentary balance in our skills. We are not the same people and each of us has been able to offer a different approach. That balance enhances sustainability and forward momentum." (Head 5)

"If you’ve got strategy and you’ve got school direction and you want to make sure it works, it’s really about capacity. Capacity – certainly within this school, the salvation has been having capacity at the top end. We have got people who have drive and ambition, they’re self-starters, they’re on board, they want to make a difference, they are high profile, they are big personalities, they are people with the right blend of skill sets at the top end of the school. And that is a quality that a Head Teacher needs. About building a team, at the top end, that can really drive a school.” (Head 6)

For these Head Teachers strategic leadership is about how strategic thinking fits in with vision and planning and that it is about sharing that view on the senior team and then beyond to middle managers so that everyone, “can be involved in it.” Some people are naturally good at thinking strategically, and others are not so inclined. However, to a certain extent leaders find they can build on strengths, they have to try to develop individuals within their organisation and get people thinking that way.

Head 2 stated, “One of my strategic aims is enthusing staff at all levels, helping them to have a go to find another way of doing things.” This was echoed by Head 6 who linked this with a view that successful strategic leadership is about making sure that staff feel fully supported and are able to take risks, do things and report back;

“But you let them run with things and you let them take risks, and if the wheel comes off now and again, that’s fine. You metaphorically put your arm round them, and say that’s not a problem. Because otherwise they’re not going to take another risk for you ...But it is also about knowing people’s particular strengths and abilities.” (Head 6)
From the interviews with Head Teachers it is clear that planning for reflection is a key element of strategic leadership and that it is built into the system of several of these schools. Head Teacher 4 stressed that he made it clear to staff right from the start of his taking up post that reflection on everything would take place and that no assumptions should be made that if something is done one year it will carry on the next.

“That almost inevitably means change. What it does mean is reflection. So everything that we do we reflect on it. We’ve got quite a simple system. We just sit down and say how did it go, we record some information about it. So that next time round it gets built in to the planning.” (Head 4)

“...so we will reflect on each of those issues as data comes in, and then we are using that directly to feed into next year’s Development Plan. That’s been in operation for almost a year and a half. In terms of whole school strategy events - we constantly talk strategy and look to the future anyway.” (Head 1)

“I don’t think there are many things that you do that you don’t reflect on how you do it. There are things that you do, that when you reflect on it think - that was the right thing to do. And there are things that you do, that when you reflect on it you think if I had to do it again, I’d do it differently. But that is what learning is. Certainly, yes, it does make you reflect, and sometimes you reflect and it makes you stronger. And even sometimes when you have opposition - someone has said that if you’re going to be a Head then you need courage. I certainly think that is true.” (Head 2)

Only two of the participants (Heads 7 and 8) were unable to talk directly about planning for reflection; “I’m not sure that we have much time for reflection here.” (Head 8) and, “No it just highlights the frustrations I think and amplifies the difficulties.” (Head 7) However, it was apparent from the discussion of approaches by these two Head Teachers and the analytical consideration of both national and local issues, (see page 96) that reflection is well established in these schools. Even within these interviews where Head Teachers emphasised that there was no deliberate time made for reflection it is a natural part of the strategic process and a natural extension of any monitoring and evaluation that takes place. Strategic processes within these identified schools demonstrate that Head Teachers are thinking in terms of regular meetings and regular consultation, making sure that initiatives are reflected upon and embedded with a clear focus upon teaching and learning. Assessment for Learning is playing a key part in helping to sustain
initiatives in Schools 1, 3 and 8 through the involvement of all within the school community.

“Development plan wise we have made sure that the strategical approach - that Assessment for Learning isn't seen as a one off event. We've embedded it in everyone's job descriptions. It's in the main scale job descriptions. It's written into our policies. So it's joined up thinking and we make sure that it is sustained. We come back to these issues at our Senior Leader's meetings, and we come back to them with Middle leaders and at our Staff Meetings as well.” (Head 1)

“The biggest area has been assessment, developing into Assessment for Learning. That has produced a whole set of major changes and improvements and has certainly caused middle managers to see themselves in a different light. I have been very pleased with that.” (Head 8)

Leading the learning of students is the core strategic purpose for each of these Head Teachers and some articulated that they are prepared to change anything if it needs to be changed to improve learning.

“The bottom line from my point of view is that the learner is at the centre of everything that we do. I think it is depersonalising it, because I think sometimes that the staff think that you are asking them to do something for you. I'm not asking them to do anything for me, I'm asking them to do the very best that they can for every student that sits in their classroom.” (Head 2)

“So we don't change for the sake of change, I make sure we keep the focus on our core purpose. Thinking about learning. But prepared to change anything if it needs to be changed to improve that learning.” (Head 4)

The challenge and successes of raising standards helps to ensure that schools keep the focus on teaching and learning. Head Teachers (1, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9) demonstrated pride in the range of teaching strategies and opportunities available in their schools emphasising the importance of a shared strategic vision which keeps the learning climate central to the ethos of their schools. External initiatives such as Performance Management changes are seen by Head 4 to be helping leaders to centre greater focus on learning and measuring the quality of the learning is seen by the Head Teachers interviewed as helpful in embedding the strategic approaches that they have made.
Strategic change is always difficult and it was evident from most of these interviews that Head Teachers feel strongly that you can’t convince everybody but hope that there is a critical mass that supports the strategy adopted and that others can be convinced afterwards.

“I’m not pretending that it is easy, but it is almost a given that there will be change.” (Head Teacher 4)

“I monitor the success of strategic change – if I get feedback from the main stakeholders which is positive, then I know we are going in the right direction.” (Head 8)

Head Teacher 5 stressed that people need a vehicle for development, something that has a wow factor or something that we can look to the future for. Some of the Head Teachers (3, 4, 5 and 9) who have been in post longer have felt able to take a degree of risk in appointing people to senior positions before the existing post holder had left their school. With the pace of change being what it is and the strategic direction of the utmost importance this tactic avoided allowing someone key to the success of strategic initiatives to slip away from the school.

“In my TLR plan there is going to be an executive group of four and a broader group of ten. But at the moment I have someone who has come back from secondment and two people who didn’t leave who were looking at moving on and remained, and so we are in the interim at the moment…” (Head 4)

Keeping the emphasis on longer term commitment as well as the day to day is sometimes difficult for Head Teachers to secure and it was clear that they set out to ensure that where staff were not convinced before an initiative that they were on side afterwards.

“You can have a feeling that nearly everyone is against you, but if in your heart of hearts believe that this is the right thing to do then you have to hold on to that, and when you look back usually people who are gracious enough will say to you, that was a hard task but we got there. Sometimes you can reflect on it but it’s a hard journey to get to the reflection.” (Head 2)

“I often get frustrated that things aren't changing quickly enough. It's that blend between making sure that you are not going at such a pace that you are not taking anyone with you but not going so slowly that you are losing momentum and not getting anywhere.” (Head 10)
The interviews demonstrated that Head Teachers approach this in different ways and to embed strategic intentions into other peoples practice involves a variety of things. Some Head Teachers (4, 5, 6, 9 and 10) either sit down next to staff if they are prepared to learn and tell them how to do something if they need to be told and for others they will ensure that staff are provided with models of good practice. Of the utmost importance is that the strategy works and for the Head Teachers participating in this study it is about sharing the leadership and working with people to help them to see that it is not just about planning.

"... we developed four strategic intents for the College and now everything that we do is measured against those. If it doesn't take us towards one of those then the question is – why are we doing it then. The governors on their full agenda, every meeting, we discuss one of those four strategic intents before we do any other mundane business. It's always first. We decided it was important...every full governors meeting we look in detail at what we are doing towards that particular intent and whether we need to change it, how far we've got and how the work of the governing body builds in to that." (Head 4)

An important part of the role of the Governing bodies of schools is strategic leadership yet some schools find that it isn't a role which Governors take on unless the Head Teacher makes a real attempt to get them thinking strategically. Head Teachers 4, 5, and 10 emphasised that there had been a shift in the Governors’ involvement in strategic leadership since their appointment.

"Part of their (Governor) role is to ask awkward questions, to challenge and to bring a broader perspective from the outside world into the secret garden of school... I would want the governors to have a broader strategic view and I would like to be able to say, in five years time what do you think we are going to be like, and what would you like to see. I am quite happy with that, because I am sure it is a big part of my role, but I would like that greater depth of vision. It's moved on no end from when I first came.” (Head 5)

"We needed to get them (Governors) thinking strategically, and it couldn't be done overnight. It involved training, it involved changing the way we run our meetings, and it involved being prepared to say - does it really matter if we never get to the curriculum sub-committee or whatever it might be, as long as we talk about where we're actually going as a College and what's important...It has been quite hard work getting them there. I'm much more comfortable with where they are now ..." (Head 4)
It is inevitable that the different context, the differing skills and aptitudes of Governing bodies and the individual perception of the leaders involved determine how far the Governors are playing a strategic role. However, for all, the main issue is about communication and some Heads emphasised that for them transparency with Governors secures their commitment to what the School Leaders are setting out to do strategically;

"Transparency – I hide very little. I hide nothing from the governors. The governors are a fantastic bunch of people who can be extremely difficult at times. Extremely challenging. They ask some very relevant and pertinent questions which put me on the spot." (Head 6)

Discussion Summary
The literature review demonstrated that successful strategic leadership needs to be effective in the short term but also ensure that the core moral purpose of student learning is translated into challenging and stimulating educational provision that works towards longer term targets. The responses within these interviews show that Head Teachers recognise these sometimes conflicting demands but sometimes find it difficult to create sufficient time and resources to engage effectively in the various strategic government initiatives that they are currently expected to be part of. They enjoy leading learning to promote and develop the quality of the teaching and learning in the classroom but find that other issues prevent them doing this as much as they would like.

Interview responses within this study demonstrate that Head Teachers consider that strategy is about having a clear vision of where the school is heading based upon the core moral purpose and values of the individual establishment. They generally see strategy as providing the broad view to set the future direction of the school and this provides the template upon which they measure their day to day operational goals. Effective communication, sharing of the vision and ensuring that stakeholders are involved in strategic thinking and strategic decisions was seen as a key element of strategic leadership by Head Teachers. Developing and sharing the strategic vision helps the school leadership to focus upon the key elements that will ensure longer term sustainable success while at the same time facilitate stakeholders to keep the overarching purpose in mind alongside their operational activities.
Head Teachers expressed their frustration at dealing with too many initiatives in a short space of time and emphasised that on reflection their best opportunities have arisen when they have been able to pick up something that is “right” for their school at a given moment in time and leave those that will be less effective in assuring their strategic goals. This takes a certain degree of confidence and experience and it was interesting that Head Teachers who had been in post for more than 4 years stressed more emphatically than newer Heads that it is about having the courage of your convictions, setting priorities, asking the right questions and keeping the forward momentum.

“What tends to differentiate effective and ineffective leaders is the quality of their judgements; whether their decisions work for the students in the long term. Knowing and remembering to ask the right questions depends on both wisdom and judgement. A significant part of a formal leader’s job is to act as a gatekeeper, to ask the right questions, to know what initiatives to support, what to oppose, and what to subvert.” (Fink, 2005, p.110)

4.2 Strategic Change

Collins (2001) stresses that one of the characteristics of the highest level leaders is that they demonstrate an unwavering resolve to do whatever needs to be done in order to achieve the best long-term results. This is not easy as balancing the ambiguities of the current education system, producing short term results and managing dissonance and dissatisfaction, (for some of these Head Teachers whilst also under the scrutiny of HMI) and also driving forward initiatives to achieve long term goals at the same time, requires high level leadership qualities.

Most of the Head Teachers interviewed saw that part of their role as strategic leader is to ensure that the continuous development is always there. This inevitably means change, but as Heads 4, 5 and 6 pointed out, change in itself does not guarantee either strategic practice or sustainability.

“It’s easy when you are in the early stages of Headship to be overwhelmed by change…I remember thinking to myself that when I was the Deputy looking at the school I actually saw a Head Teacher who was besieged. Who couldn’t run the school effectively – she was never on the bridge – she was never thinking in terms of strategy – she was always swamped. Never knowing what to go with next. Never knowing where to go next in any sense and it was because there was no strategic approach. There was a junkyard approach to management. A bit thrown over here and a bit thrown over there and there was no strategy, and there was no direction and there was no game plan.” (Head 6)
“I don’t think you can plan for constants, I think we are planning for change.” (Head 2)

“The strategic thinking is very important. The sustainability is quite difficult in schools because staff move on and we encourage them to do that, encourage a certain amount of turnover. You develop people, develop them into a role that you know probably won’t exist for them here so they move on. So the sustainability is very difficult.” (Head 4)

“I try to bring an attitude to the school that change is normal and that change is good and that it is healthy and developmental. I think I have had varying degrees of success. There is an acceptance that the school has to carry on moving on and changing. I thrive on it and I enjoy it. It’s one of the things that I like about the job. Some of us need change in a strategic sense, that the agenda does change, that the priorities shift a little bit. Strategic direction needs to change and the vision for the school needs to be changing.” (Head 5)

For one Head Teacher now in the fourth year of Headship, the nature and context of the situation the school was in had prevented any thoughts of sustainability as a concept.

“I don’t see sustainability as being a concept that I have even considered. Change in education is so quick and rapid, I don’t see where sustainability comes from.” (Head 7)

Several of the Head Teachers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) reflected on what their schools were like when they took up post and it was interesting to note that many of these (all except 4), felt their schools were not open to change on their appointment. Each leader found ways to address that depending upon the context and individual needs of the school in question.

“The school, I think, three or four years ago, wasn’t open to change. We've actually had training through the East Midlands Enterprise Board on management of change and we've trained the middle leaders on that. I suppose one of the key things that we've done here is develop a strong middle leadership team. “(Head 1)

“Because the headline figures have always held up, nobody has asked any questions. So change here has been quite frightening for people. Therefore the issue has been not only managing the change but getting over the denial culture...I am securing commitment by valuing what they do, by flagging up what they do, making sure that they know their contribution is valued. Making sure they receive the training that they need. If they need resources, they get those. That they feel management is listening to them and so has brought them on board.” (Head 3)
Sustainability is helped by Leaders knowing where they want to go, as that way they can work out strategies for how the school is going to get there. Head Teachers 4 and 5 emphasised that this way schools are better placed when there are government initiatives to be addressed. Head Teacher 4 talked about using the energy of those initiatives to move schools forward towards where they want to be and used a good analogy of a surfer moving on a wave, unsure of exactly where the wave is going but using its energy to propel him forward rather than sitting on the beach and getting nowhere.

"It’s kind of complex, but if you know where you are going to go, you can work out some strategies to get there, but you get hit by all kinds of other things, government initiatives and so on... There is no point wallowing about in the shallows waiting for this wave to crash on you, and say “Oh this is dreadful”. Which is what a lot of Heads do. I think you’ve got to say – this thing is happening.” (Head 4)

"I think if you are able to go to people and say “if we get involved in these things, and get involved in the 14-19 curriculum and collaborate with the other schools, develop our specialist status and take on these ideas we are going to give a very distinctive edge to the school which is quite compelling.” (Head 5)

For Head Teacher 9 the move to having strategic intent, six or seven years ago has made a difference to the way people see school strategic development. It has helped to keep the focus on where the school is heading and is evident across the school from the Staff Handbook to the School Development Plan. However, the point was made that as leaders become more confident in their strategic intentions they begin to judge instinctively what is right for their individual school.

“When you are looking at the changes that are coming in, you think how does that fit with my vision, how do we benefit from this. Whereas in the early days you perhaps feel pressurised, and think you have to go in this direction and then that direction. I think you become a bit more confident, or a bit more arrogant, in terms of I know what I want, I’m convinced we can be more successful and do the best for our children in this way, and I don’t believe we need it.” (Head 9)

It was not surprising to find within these interviews that Government directed strategic change is not universally applauded by Head Teachers:
"Government strategy has killed us. When we did develop a short strategic move to become more vocational – we are comfortable with that. We have gone up the tables. Now government says that they only want to know about kids' innate ability in English and Maths. So the ASTs are tasked with English and Maths and that's their role in school." (Head 7)

Strategic change initiatives are closely tied in with the leadership of the respective Head Teachers but the sustainable effects are evident in schools 2, 4 and 5 through their working with others and distributing the leadership widely throughout their organisations.

"To some degree the sustainability of leadership is not about getting people to do the jobs neatly and well. It is much more about setting a higher agenda and maybe it's not what's on the sheet it's actually the blank sheet that counts. It's about the person who can diagnose and find what else we can be doing that's not already being done." (Head 5)

A similar stance was taken by Head Teacher 2 who discussed the ways the school had tried to encourage leadership amongst subject leaders and tried to empower them to take things on by setting up a subject leaders group led by a peer. However, for this Head teacher the main emphasis was upon how the subject leader involvement has proved effective in sharing good practice and has helped to embed strategic change to make it more sustainable in the longer term.

"We set up a Subject Leaders Development Group and actually one of the subject leaders themselves runs it, and subject leaders come and they share good practice and what they are doing in their departments. That has worked really quite well. When you are a new Head, they think you are driving everything, but eventually someone else has to drive as well. Otherwise it becomes my roadshow. But you can only drive one car at a time and sometimes you feel that it’s a juggernaut and everyone is sitting on seats behind you rather than someone sitting up here at the control panel. So that has been quite good and I’m pleased with the way it has developed and I think people feel empowered by that." (Head 2)

Head Teachers 4 and 6 look towards smaller teams to distribute leadership within their schools;

"We have a simple but formal reflection mechanism and feed that into planning and strategy. We are also trying to make sure that everybody on the Senior Team has as part of their role, the analytical responsibility
to look at things and to unpick them and say what was the effect of this, is it sustainable, did it work, does it need to be changed.” (Head 4)

“I have an Assistant Head who has the absolute respect and gravity in the staffroom. He is one of the longest serving members of staff. People have absolute confidence in him – he is a man of few words but when he speaks people listen. If I want to know how things are going to be received in the staff room I ask, “What do you think of this, how do you think this will go down”. And that is about skill set. If you put all of those qualities together you’ve got a fantastic Leadership team and if you give them the space and the time to do the job that is about capacity. They will manage change effectively for you, if they know that you’ve got your game plan and you know where you are heading they will run with it.” (Head 6)

Monitoring and evaluation of strategic change initiatives are in place in each of the schools considered within this report and each Head Teacher used meetings and minutes from departmental and staff meetings to build upon their School Self-evaluation (SEF) to modify the detail and then forward it to governors with consideration of how far the strategic objectives have been met.

For Schools 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 one of the most important things the Heads had done was to develop fairly robust monitoring systems although the emphasis on how far individual stakeholders were involved varies from School to School. An innovative approach to monitoring student views was taken by Head Teacher 1 who explained that they interview 10% of their students as part of their monitoring process to determine the effect of long term strategic initiatives for improving the curriculum and learning opportunities for students. This structure incorporates both monitoring and self-evaluation procedures;

“That’s quite a big change, where staff are accountable almost to the children, and staff have to look at what the children think of their lessons and how effective they are.” (Head Teacher 1)

They have also given students the chance to write whether they feel they can learn without interruption and extended that to subject area comments.

For others in schools where there are, or have been, greater external pressures the initial strategy (for Schools 2, 3, 5 and 7) was clearly one of setting up monitoring systems while at the same time raising staff morale by raising achievement.
"There needed to be a more rigorous attention to standards. There needed to be more attention to what was going on. There needed to be more rigorous monitoring of what was going on. There needed to be more close focus on GCSE." (Head 5)

Ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined for monitoring systems was essential to success in schools 1, 3, 5, 6 and 10.

“You do that within the plan by making sure that against those priorities, people have responsibility for the delivery of them. Other people are responsible for the monitoring of that, and other people are responsible for the evaluation and for looking at the impact… In terms of aligning people to it, and getting people falling in behind the banner – it’s about making sure that people are responsible for it, other people are monitoring it, other people evaluate it. Different people in each case – it might be very different bodies. I mentioned the School Council, but it might be different people within the Governing Body or people within the School Leadership Team.” (Head 6)

The impact of resources and TLR long term initiatives were at the forefront of some of the Head Teachers’ deliberations when looking at the sustainable impact of strategic change initiatives at the present time. With falling roles and increased demands some of the Head Teachers (1, 4, 5, 7 and 10) explained that they are having to spend on old buildings rather than the more creative and imaginative things they would prefer;

“Either the government is incredibly naive or they think that we are, because in real terms the money that we get drops every year. We have things like TLR which might save money in three years, but in the interim while people are on protected salaries it’s more expensive. Four per cent per pupil guarantee sounds great, it is above the rate of inflation, except you only get four per cent on that per pupil bit of your budget share and on the rest you get no increase so you only get two per cent overall.” (Head 4)

“At a time when spectre of falling roles looms, and at a time when we had more generous funding, we qualified for a Leadership Incentive Grant, we got a fair whack which allowed us to expand the Management Team. A situation where more than a quarter of our teaching staff are on the highest management allowance, is simply not sustainable. And it is less sustainable even more at a time when we are trying to emphasise the rigour that some of the management points that are in the system are utterly spurious – supervising the bike sheds kind of duties – there was no common ground between the head of a core department with massive responsibilities to drive up the accountability and something else which didn’t sit easily alongside but didn’t have the same responsibility.” (Head 5)
However, not all Heads saw it in this way and alternative views were presented by Heads 3 and 8;

“One of the big arguments that people raise is the fact that you can’t be sustainable in anything without knowing how you’re going to plan financially over the next few years. I think you can in the main, because if you track your student numbers in the primary schools, you know when the dips are going to occur. And we know that in 2010 we are going to hit a dip. I think if you use a 5 year planning module, which the LEA provide, you can see post standards funds, up to £150,000 where the dip’s going to occur and so we have made salary adjustments accordingly. So what I’ve tried to do is not appoint people in areas where it would be a luxury and in the next couple of years I’m spending the money on resources.” (Head 3)

“I’m very concerned about quite a lot of what is happening nationally, so it is very interesting to see what is happening to sixth form funding currently. That is right in my mind at the moment. I am aware that there are many schools in Lincolnshire with sixth forms who haven’t even switched on to what is happening with sixth form funding, which is being reduced and systems changed, to bring it into line with Learning and Skills Council and FE provision. I think that that is not good news and nobody is shouting about it. So sometimes I think that we miss a lot really.” (Head 8)

For Schools 1, 3, 4, 5 and 10 Teaching and Learning Responsibility Payments (TLRs) have meant structural change whereas Schools 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 found the process more straightforward to work within their existing arrangements. Head Teacher 1 pointed out that restructuring the workforce had allowed the creation of 10 new TLR posts to create a structure that “looks to the future” and allowed the alignment of key people to roles with sustainable strategic direction.

“But what I’ve done is that I’ve made up a structure that looks to the future. So, for instance, I’ve got a person, who is employed to do vocational development, who was employed on 1st April. So I’m looking forward to that. And I see that as a key issue in terms of sustaining this school, if we are going to respond to the 14-19 strategy, and respond to the 14 vocational strands, and the 14 diplomas. We have to have someone here who is looking at that.” (Head 1)

“It has evolved and their roles have changed and will continue to change. Again there is no great over arching structure that I could show you a diagram of. Its really people taking on roles in an almost informal way, but staff know who to turn to. It has an informality about it – its just getting the job done. They were all doing different things when I got here, but they all want to be doing what they are doing now.” (Head 7)
Head Teachers 3, 4 and 10 have found that this government initiative has also helped in restructuring the other aspects of what they are setting out to achieve.

“We could have fought a losing battle a while ago trying to do something it just wasn’t the right time for. So where we are going as a College has been helped by things like that – by TLR, which has helped us to restructure – not just the staffing, but the whole College.” (Head 4)

“There has been quite a lot of work done on extending the senior Leadership Team…Those people who were unsuccessful in becoming an Assistant Head in December (we had six internal applications) were offered the opportunity to work on an interim SLT until August to boost their CPD and one person has grown into that and will apply for one of the Assistant Head posts. But by having a large team... the ideas have been spread out.” (Head 3)

“I don’t think we are very strategic. Because of issues that have happened in the past we are so busy with the here and now setting up systems. That is going to come now we have restructured the leadership team because by having really clear job descriptions people are now going to be strategic for their own area.” (Head 10)

Staff movement caused problems for schools 5 and 4; individuals were brought in to fill a perceived need and in the case of school 5 the individual brought in was from the LEA because the existing deputy was seconded to an acting Headship within the county. This did not work out as well for the school as anticipated as the appointment was intended to facilitate the individual’s experience to fulfil new government legislation about every advisor having to have experience as a head or deputy rather than from the appointee’s own choice.

“I didn’t radically start with a blank sheet at the point of the start of the staffing structure review but I did make some changes which inevitably will reduce the number of management allowances or TLR equivalents, in the system. That was quite painful at the time. Some schools had a staffing structure which they were quite happy with and essentially that became an assimilation process. I didn’t feel that we could simply say that these management allowances are now TLRs and we carry on as we always have been. We did have to shift something.” (Head 5)

For School 7 the restructuring was reactive to the school situation;

“Each Head of Year has a full-time pastoral manager working with them. That has been very useful. Again you could argue that it was a reaction to the 25 tasks that staff don’t do or the challenging nature of the students in this particular area. So again it was reactive and although it was strategically planned through, it was a reaction to a need.” (Head 7)
However, for others, (Heads 6 and 8) restructuring had been a tool they had not needed to use;

"...it's been very plain sailing and quite simple. I suppose that is because the people I have working with me are the people I’ve wanted to work with me, because I’ve been absolutely satisfied that they can do the job that I want them to do. If I hadn’t been satisfied then I would have used the opportunity to use the pay and reward structure to change things, and as a lever for change." (Head 6)

Performance Management is an area some Head Teachers were sure would need to change and the government initiative has helped in creating the scenario for change in a similar way to the way the TLR system helped schools to restructure their establishment.

"I think you’ve got to say – this thing is happening, Performance Management is the one now, how can it take us towards our vision of where we want to be. If you can do that then you can actually use those things to develop your strategy. And I think you have to be patient. So we said probably eighteen months ago that we thought we had to change Performance Management and we weren’t quite sure how we were going to do it. And low and behold the government has given us a reason to change it, and it builds in some of the things we wanted to do. But the other ones we can do at the same time.” (Head 4)

Key Government initiatives such as TLR payments have influenced the leadership to create roles facilitating the 14 - 19 curriculum strands in some schools and for others in creating more explicit job descriptions and responsibilities for key initiatives such as Gifted and Talented co-ordinators across the schools considered.

"Another part of strategy, was to branch out. The whole raft of things that have been quite key for us to develop, that would be for the school long term. Specialist status brings with it greater links and a more outward looking agenda. We have been very excited by some of the 14-19 developments and the potential to work with other schools and for developing the curriculum, and a more vocational range of options for some of our youngsters.” (Head 5)

Head Teacher 5 acknowledged that sometimes it is helpful that the staff express fears and explained that there had been a discussion with the staff about how it might be when the school works in collaboration with the other schools, and how the rubric
and detail of the Education Bill and latest information about specialised diplomas says that no one school can develop and deliver all 14 lines. Staff were open about their fears and saw how it was very likely that the school might lead on one or two and this helped to alleviate some of their concerns. There was a lot of discussion with staff about what this means for the future, presenting a view to them that the school might have teachers who are employed on a multiple range of sites.

"Some teachers are rubbing their hands and saying – yes I can see that this could be a really exciting, fantastic staff development opportunity - forward thinking flexibility, but there are others who feel terribly threatened by this, jobs will disappear, it will be disruptive. Maintaining a very positive outlook, but really there is no particular alternative – if we don’t go along with this then we will die on our feet as a school." (Head 5)

For other schools (both comprehensive and grammar) however, some concerns were raised about the 14 – 19 developments and the effect it would have on student learning;

"We have changed the curriculum quite significantly, in terms of introducing much more vocational courses and choices. It’s had a significant impact. Our attendance was 88% and is now 91% - which apparently is quite a big change. The 14-19 changes that the government is proposing threatens that, because it is not a good system with the new diplomas. I suspect it will cut our legs away from us, because the courses they are proposing are not as good as the courses we currently run. They are not replacing like for like, they are replacing with a set of courses that I don’t think are suitable for the students at this school.” (Head 7)

"I’m also worried that there may well be a demand for some of those courses but we’re in a deprived area, and we’re about raising aspirations, and I fear that actually a lot of them will be attracted by those courses in Hairdressing or Engineering, but actually they won’t be pushed on as much as perhaps they could.” (Head 9)

An interesting view presented by Head 8, following a meeting of the seven schools in Lincoln who are forming a trust, (perhaps as a response to the Academy developing from the remaining Lincoln schools) was to the fact that independence and collaborative working to fulfil the 14 – 19 requirements need not be a contradiction in philosophy.
"The thinking was, (maybe they have perceived a threat from the academy), that there are several schools, quite proud of their independence, (all of them are foundation schools) wanting to retain that individuality, but at the same time seeing the benefits of working collaboratively. The message that came across was quite an impressive one.” (Head 8)

Accountability was raised as a pressure by Head Teachers within the interviews undertaken and the strategic change initiatives introduced have had to take account of this. All schools, regardless of size and type, were very aware of the influence of League tables and OFSTED reports. However, the Heads of secondary modern and some comprehensive schools were acutely aware that at this time of demographic fall in pupil numbers they are vulnerable to pressures of parental choice. (Schools 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7)

"There is an accountability pressure that schools feel very, very strongly. A sense, particularly in this school – a secondary modern, that there is a greater pressure than in a grammar school or a comprehensive school, in terms of accountability and league tables, I suppose secondary moderns are the schools where, in very crude terms, there is still growing room.” (Head 5)

For Grammar School Head Teacher 8 it is important to put people first as that brings the biggest personal satisfaction but also the greatest problems. Schools are used to the concept of change and leaders don’t think that is the issue any more as it is just part of what they do. However, having a real voice in what is taking place is of paramount importance to several of the school leaders within this study;

"I think we have got to make sure that schools’ voice is sufficiently prominent to ensure that when initiatives come through that are just not realistic and we know that they cannot be delivered, that we get in there with a reasonable set of controls.” (Head 8)

Head 7 discussed the ways in which accountability through the School Improvement Partner (SIP) has helped to put appropriate systems of self-evaluation in place.

"We were part of the remodelling pilot. We have had to be very disciplined - our school self-evaluation is really good. People put a lot of time and effort and planning into it. When I joined, within a term, we had an OFSTED inspection and we got through it. After that we were invited to be part of the pilot so we had to get our systems in place from the very beginning. Its one of the things which I would say is a real strength of the school. We know where we are going wrong and we are trying to put it right.” (Head 7)
Some Head Teachers believe that the best measure of strategic success is through stakeholders;

"I would say probably it's when you get the feedback from the community, parents, from business that you realise that actually you are not doing a bad job. That gives me a lot of satisfaction."

(Head 8)

Positive feedback from stakeholders does sometimes help to keep leaders motivated and on course but for Heads of the Schools that had been under threat of serious weaknesses, the short term goal of an improved OFSTED report influenced all action and was seen as the next vital step to success if anything planned for the future was to be sustainable;

"In terms of interim goals, of knowing that OFSTED were going to come back in March, or before. We had a definite goal to go towards. Everybody can celebrate in that success, because you can't get there on your own. You can't take a school from serious weakness to good with outstanding features, just because you happen to be someone who can smile nicely at the OFSTED inspector. You have to have a team of people who want to be there with you, and who have worked hard. And they have certainly worked hard to get there."

(Head 2)

Head Teacher 1 discussed the school's accountability to students themselves and explained that at this school they have given students the chance to write about whether they feel they can learn without interruption. They have extended that to subject area comments and although they are not to mention teachers individually students do refer to subjects and teaching and learning;

"And we've been brave, we've given a version of that out to staff. That's quite a big change, where staff are accountable almost to the children, and staff have to look at what the children think of their lessons and how effective they are."

(Head 1)

For schools in the centre of the city, real tensions have arisen with the Pathways Programme and the 11 schools involved in that sector of the county.

"It doesn't suit anybody, and that's the problem. But people are starting to realise that now, once they've seen the specs and they see what's involved... it just highlights the frustrations I think and amplifies the difficulties."

(Head 7)
In Lincolnshire there are many small towns with small schools, where parents and the community get to know a lot about the school, through children. Head 3 raised the concerns that public perception of the school in small areas might not actually be accurate and that the parents and others in the community can form a perception on what is heard around the tea table, and that becomes a reality.

“And they won’t bother to check it with anybody. So overnight your reputation can start to fall. I don’t think you get that in cities much, I think it is peculiar to small schools and small towns.” (Head 3)

Other smaller schools were also very aware of public perception;

“We’ve also got a Gifted and Able Coordinator who is actually a non-teacher who has taken up that role, and I think she is responsible for a lot of the extra recruitment. Because the middle class parents previously thought that this school was a no no, and now they see it as a very positive place to send their children. I can prove that through data.” (Head 1)

“Many of the older staff still talked about the legacy of the Louth Plan and 14+ selection and the impact of having a KS3 comprehensive intake and the impact on the school of KS4, of having the brightest youngsters creamed off to go to the grammar school. There was a feeling amongst the pupils of being discouraged and amongst the staff of how can we get the results with this group that was left. There was definitely a feeling of low expectations.” (Head 5)

School context and stakeholder perception influence any strategic change decisions that a leader may take. Interview responses demonstrate that in working to make a difference, sustainable strategic change is enhanced in these schools through systems which build reflection into their practice on a regular basis and although some of these changes are big, they need to be done to focus upon the core purpose of students’ learning.

“The problem is if you work from year to year the next time you do your Options Evening or whatever it is you can’t remember the things you talked about a year ago. So we set up a really simple system to build reflection into what we’re doing. That almost inevitably means that there is continual change. If you ask the questions, everything isn’t going to be perfect and there will be change. Some of the changes are going to be quite big, changing the school day, changing the staffing, changing the tutor group structure, and the whole way in which the college operates. Those are all quite big changes, but they need to be done, because I think that through them the learning will improve.” (Head 4)
Discussion Summary

To be able to envision the future and develop appropriate approaches to achieve successful strategic change demands both confidence and knowledge. Davies (2006) articulates that strategic leaders are aware that their organisation can perform in different ways in the future and are prepared to challenge the current situation;

“This means they have to deal with the ambiguity of not being satisfied with present arrangements and at the same time not being able to change things as quickly as they might want.” (Davies, 2006, p.112)

The focus of this study demonstrates that the challenge for the Head Teachers interviewed has been to work with (and through) some of the change initiatives to promote a positive strategic future for their schools within a core value vision that is shared by all within the community. Although school structures matter, it is the way that the individual leaders approach strategic change that makes the greatest difference to its success. It is what leaders choose to do, what they choose to abandon and when they choose to act that has the greatest impact on how far strategic change makes a difference in the longer term.

“It’s kind of complex, but if you know where you are going to go, you can work out some strategies to get there, but you get hit by all kinds of other things, government initiatives and so on. My philosophy is that you use the energy in those to move you towards where you want to be.” (Head 4)

Interview responses demonstrate that the context of the individual school and the perception of stakeholders influences strategic change initiatives. School leaders are working in a changing world;

“It is no good pretending that we can go back, or would want to go back. It’s part of the school life, and part of education.” (Head 8)

The Head Teachers interviewed are aware of the danger of taking on too many strategic change initiatives and they create systems to reflect upon, monitor and evaluate developments undertaken to ensure that they maintain their focus on what is important for their school.
"Strategically opportunistic schools position themselves to make a choice between alternative opportunities and to choose only those that fit their strategic direction and development framework." (Davies, Davies and Ellison, 2006, p.64)

4.3 Sustainability and Strategic Context

The Literature Review ascertained that;

"Sustainability...requires continuous improvement, adaptation, and collective problem solving in the face of complex challenges that keep arising." (Fullan, 2006, p.22)

This is concurred within the interviews undertaken and the discussion demonstrates that the strategic context and how it changes over time is a key consideration for these leaders of schools today.

"To some degree you have advantages with new situations, because they (staff) look to you for new ideas. But then you have to rechristen, re-brand, revisit those ideas. That's one element of it. The other much more important aspect is sustainability in terms of the school's forward momentum, and I should think you find some degree of unanimity amongst the heads." (Head 5)

Head Teachers of smaller schools are very aware of their financial vulnerabilities when there is not a reliable source of numbers on roll and consequently careful that any development adopted has a strategic basis with a clear view of how it goes through to the future. Increasing pupil numbers allows for greater recruitment of staff that can then be placed into roles that have specific strategic development issues, leaving the school’s opportunity for sustaining strategic change more likely.

In some instances there has been a deliberate change of focus that has led to a change in ethos.

"We have deliberately changed our focus very much to the top end of the school, while still maintaining a very strong Special Needs department. So we have changed the ethos of the school ..." (Head 1)

"I think we probably would have...thought about the school in isolation ten years ago. I think we have to recognise now that the school is part of the system, part of a network, part of partnerships, and you can't do strategic thinking just of your own school. It’s got to fit in, so therefore there’s a dimension to it which involves a system of leadership. It’s about how we’re changing. What happens in the town. How we relate to
some of the other bodies that we work with – whatever they might be - Social Services, Universities, all sorts of things. There is no use having sustainable, strategic thinking in school if it doesn’t tie in with all those other bits and pieces as well.” (Head 4)

Reflections on leadership role indicate that Head Teachers found that some of these changes were about raising the status of their schools to achieve greater sustainability by attracting more students and recruiting the right members of staff.

“The key issue identified when I got the job was to raise the status of the school so that we could sustain what we were doing here. There were several issues in that. Raising the status of the school in terms of attracting more able students, which we weren't doing at that point. Raising the status of the school in terms of raising the aspirations of students - which has definitely happened - that is proven by what I just said. Raising the status of the school in terms of professional outlook as well.” (Head 1)

“When I advertise for staff I send out a letter (I’d looked carefully at the message we send out to prospective employees) and the language I use in that letter are things like – “this is an adventure”, “this is a school on a mission”, “are you the sort of person who is prepared to go the extra mile”, “are you the sort of person who would like to join the staff and knows how to work very hard, but equally knows how to play hard.” (Head 6)

In some of the smaller secondary 11 - 16 schools it was about attracting more able students and leaders saw this as a major way of creating an environment which raises the aspirations of students while at the same time improving and sustaining the professional approach of staff.

“So that has sustained it. We deliberately changed our focus very much to the top end of the school, while still maintaining a very strong Special Needs Department. So we've changed the ethos of the school to achievement, and there was no Gifted and Able co-ordination before. So there was nothing for those students.” (Head 1)

However, there is also the matter of working with other schools as the sustainability of any initiative is not just about the school in isolation, it is about how it interacts and builds upon the longer term plan with other schools as well.

“The people here are very conscious of falling roles and doom laden prophecies of the not too distant future. There is a sense that if we create something that is distinctive, and something that we can do with the other
schools, then we are going to protect some of the security and the viability of the school and it’s going to be quite a compelling and exciting future. I think retaining an air of optimism and an idealism is crucial.” (Head 5)

Some Head Teachers (6, 7 and 9) pointed out that there has been a real tension between an expectation that on one hand schools will work in collaboration and on the other hand schools are in a market place where they are in competition. Head 6 pointed out that this is particularly so in Lincolnshire, which is not noted historically for its collaborative approach to working between schools.

“There are deep historical tensions between schools, because they have been at each others throats and have been competing for pupils and in a situation where you look demographically at what’s happening, that will become more acute. That’s why the Lincolnshire approach is one of federation – of schools being federated.” (Head 6)

“The government has said for the past 10 or 15 years that you have to be highly competitive, and now we have to co-operate. So there is real tension in government policy, and I can’t see a logical way through it, because if schools have been competing and segmenting the market and competing with other schools in a fairly obvious way. I can’t see how that can change overnight. And I don’t think the 14-19 has done anything to change that.” (Head 7)

Head Teacher 8 discussed the challenges that leaders face when they see the benefits of working collaboratively yet at the same time want to retain their individuality and pride in their independence. Sometimes these leaders are having to work in clusters and groupings that are not very meaningful either in a geographical or a historical context. They have been working in collaboration for many years but not necessarily with those that they are now grouped with.

“So what do we all do? We think, let’s take the elements that will suit our cause and that we can work with and get something from, and we run with those. So that’s what we do, we prioritise and command our own strategic approach. That’s the only sensible way to do it. So that’s how I view forward thinking, I take not just the things that will benefit not just this school, but the local area.” (Head 8)

“I actually think in terms of strategy, when I’m putting strategy together and thinking about game plan for the school, I never think to myself what part or what role can other schools play in this, how can they assist me. There have been other pockets of useful collaboration – gifted and talented – there has been some useful work there. But that is likely to be the exception rather than the rule. (Head 6)
The strong feeling that came across within these interviews was that the context of the school at any given time has a major influence upon how far collaboration with other schools can promote sustainability, how far any strategic planning takes place, what is decided and ultimately what is done to ensure the sustainable success of any strategic initiative.

“If 5 A* to Cs is some glorious panacea then most grammar schools will be at 99 – 100%, high performing comprehensives will be in the 60%+ bracket, but there is a degree of fragility in secondary modern schools. And our own 5 A* to C results, not that I’m hooked up on that as any kind of valid measure necessarily – but it is something that we are judged on quite harshly and I can look at the fragility and we have had some years of improvement, as we did last year. That just represented some of the fragility. Sustaining staff morale, sustaining the forward momentum, the pressure that naturally comes to bear through all of that accountability is the key of things as far as I can see.” (Head 5)

As the strategic context changes with developments across the schools, the reflections of Head Teachers demonstrate that even greater consideration is given to sustaining the initiatives undertaken. They assert that bringing people on side and having people on board in the right places helps to secure the sustainable success of initiatives in relation to the context the school finds itself in at the present time.

“…we decided actually that we needed more people on the Senior Leadership Team who would work beyond 1265, and who would add clout to various areas, so we have redrafted the staffing structure and we’re going through now with four Assistant Heads rather than the Faculty Heads. The difference in salary is not a great deal, but it does allow someone the opportunity in the future to be put up on the Leadership scale, rather than the Faculty Head. And the clout is in getting things done I think that will help to make things more sustainable.” (Head 3)

School 1 was exposed to significant trauma with national press knocking on their door and the sustainability of the school could well have been threatened if the leadership of the school had allowed minority views to hold sway.

“Leaders have been exposed to great trauma… How do you sustain yourself when you've had a couple of years of real focus on the school, not only locally, but nationally. It's very, very draining. That's a sustainability issue - when a… (traumatic event) happens at your school you immediately think that that is the end of it at the school, because you’re not sustainable, because nobody will want to come to the school.” (Head 1)
However, under strong and strategic leadership the school overcame the obstacles in its path and the Head Teacher emphasised that the senior team are now pulling together with conviction and looking to the future in a positive changing climate.

Time appears to be a key ingredient for making strategic implementation more sustainable in the view of Head Teachers interviewed. Instant fixes are not what sustainability is about and balancing the long term strategy alongside the short term goals, giving time to both planning the strategy and thinking through the problems before implementation have aided success in schools 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9.

Heads 4, 6 and 9 acknowledged that sustainability is important but questioned where the limits lay. Head 4 discussed ways that leaders prepare other colleagues for sustaining impact perhaps even in another school, while Head 6 began to question how long the Head should stay before moving on. This was also considered in a slightly different way by Head 9 who questioned how far into the future it is indeed possible to sustain anything:

“And what is it sustainable for? Are you trying to sustain it for your length of your time as the Head or are you going to try to sustain it for the generations to come? I’m not sure how realistic that is really. I suspect you are going to try to sustain it for the time that you are Head, and to try to sustain it without you burning out at the same time.” (Head 9)

However, for schools that have been threatened by “Serious Weaknesses or Special Measures,” as three of the schools included in this study were, they have had to work very hard at securing short term successes before imminent re-inspections.

External pressures need special treatment by the Heads involved to ensure that the long term focus is not lost and that all parties share the long term vision for the school.

“At Easter we were told that we will have an inspection in between six and twelve weeks. So I am expecting a call, and if I hear on Monday that it is between now and the end of the Summer term, that would be a real dilemma. Because the school would go into Special Measures. I know it would go into Special Measures. If they leave us until September we could get away with a notice to improve. So my sustainable strategies are not only to get us through now, but through the long term too.” (Head 3)
“And some instances that can be quite painful, but it’s walking the tight line of where you are in a school which has had serious issues. There have been competency issues here. Where people feel that if they’re having to admit that they are not competent in a particular area - is this going to impact on your view of their complete competence. It’s developing their trust and saying that we’re not all good at everything. There are things that you need to get better at because it’s part of your job and we need to find ways of doing that. I think a lot of it has to do with knowing them, and a lot of it has to do with trust.” (Head 2)

Interview responses demonstrated that OFSTED inspections appear to have had a negative effect on sustainable improvement in some Lincolnshire secondary schools:

“We had a very successful period where our results went from 9% 5 A* - C, steadily up to 44%, which in our terms is a plausible rise, then they slipped back to 42% last year, and ironically it probably was the circumstances surrounding that dip that underlined the lack of sustainability of a narrow agenda. What had happened is during that year we had an OFSTED inspection which was very successful with positive comments, graded level 2, and positive comments all the way through. That felt good, but probably meant that we took our eye off the ball and were less relentless in chasing some things and too busy with OFSTED. Apparently in that year there were 9 Lincolnshire secondary schools being OFSTEDed and in 8 of them there was a dip in GCSE results.” (Head 5)

Lack of sufficient resources is a common thread of frustration across schools of all sizes as Head Teachers reflected upon sustainability within their schools. They need money to spend on creative and imaginative teaching and learning and find that old buildings, pupil number restrictions and budget share too often gets in the way of doing what they plan with any guarantee of sustainable resource.

“So what I’ve tried to do is not appoint people in areas where it would be a luxury and in the next couple of years I’m spending the money on resources. Once numbers are stable and we can sell a product, then I think we will be sustainable.” (Head 3)

“I’d like to change the school – I’d like to rebuild, which is a possibility through Academies. I think the school is incredibly badly designed and whoever did design the school should be in prison now. I’d like to change the system more than the school, because I think the school suffers from the system rather than what goes on once the kids get here.” (Head 7)

“As a small school, perhaps not with a reliable source of numbers on roll, every development that you put forward in the school, if it's got a
financial cost, which most have, has to be thought about very carefully in terms of whether it's going to be something that goes through to the future, and in this school, and I suppose in most of the other small schools, there is severe pressure from outside in terms of best value.” (Head 1)

Strategic thinking about the sustainable future of schools demonstrated that each of these Head Teachers from schools of all sizes recognised that alone they can not satisfy the access demands of all the vocational areas to be offered in the new 14 – 19 curriculum. They see that by working together with other schools the curriculum is expanded for their students but also that action is determined by individual context and school situation.

“The things that we can do, a much smaller school might struggle with. There are falling rolls in primary schools. We have to be thinking, there are things we want to do – can we afford it in three years time, if the numbers in Year 7 drop. The context of working with other schools means that some things become more sustainable, because effectively you are creating a bigger organisation. The context is quite important...we’re not working in isolation anymore.” (Head 4)

Discussion Summary

Sustainable strategic success is most likely if initiatives are introduced when the school leaders are ready for change; the organisation needs change and the external conditions force the change.

“The leadership challenge of when to make a significant strategic change is as critical to success as choosing what strategic change to make.” (Davies, 2006, p.135)

Discussion within these interviews demonstrated that the context of each school at any given time has an effect not only upon how the leaders react to change initiatives but also to how far they are able to introduce innovation, how it will be accepted by others and the resource constraints that they will face. The research has shown that the new government policies of 14 – 19 education, diplomas, extended services and vocational training provision have made collaboration and networking with other agencies an essential part of the Head Teachers’ current role. This has led to some schools restructuring their workforce to recognise these
changes in delivery and has led to change at an unprecedented level in some schools.

The interviews demonstrate that Head Teachers recognise that networking is now an essential ingredient for the successful outcome of these initiatives, but some are finding that they are so busy fire-fighting the day to day issues that arise that they are struggling to find the time to encompass all they would wish to achieve. Some are frustrated by policy overload and all, without exception, found the role and tasks related to accountability very time-consuming. However, despite this, most retain an air of positivity and ebullience in their approach; they are keen to do the right thing and prepared to do their utmost to secure a positive and sustainable educational outcome for their schools.

System leaders have a responsibility to create networks and clusters and inspire leadership by challenging current practice and creating a culture of change. Head Teachers are aware of this and some identified that it is only by working together that we can secure excellence in our schools and facilitate strategic sustainability across the wider system.

"I think we have to recognise now that the school is part of the system, part of a network, part of partnerships, and you can't do strategic thinking just of your own school. It's got to fit in, so therefore there's a dimension to it which involves a system of leadership. It's about how we're changing. What happens in the town. How we relate to some of the other bodies that we work with - whatever they might be - Social Services, Universities, all sorts of things. There is no use having sustainable, strategic thinking in school if it doesn't tie in with all those other bits and pieces as well." (Head 4)

4.4 Developing People to make Strategic Change Sustainable

It is the leader's role to view the entire school community as a whole and the literature review established that effective school leaders help stakeholders to develop a school wide perspective in order to establish positive change. Developing people is a key leadership role that allows Head Teachers to have an impact on the motivation and development of their staff. Leadership is about developing people and the Head Teachers interviewed each approached this area in different ways. The strategy of Head Teachers 1, 3, 4 and 5 has been to invest quite heavily in "Leading
from the Middle” approaches and courses as they believe developing middle leadership is an issue.

“We've spent quite a lot on middle leadership, which I think is a key issue. In the early days here I was very much a lone voice, trying to push us forward, and in the middle leadership group two people have done the Leading from the Middle course, three from that Middle Leadership team are going to be doing it this year. We have invested in that quite heavily, because we believe that is the way to change the school.” (Head 1)

“Now I think we are in that stage now, to actually attain a degree of sustainability we need to push on the role of the middle leader. I think it's coming, it's inconsistent, and I think to some degree it's inevitable that it is inconsistent. I am working with a wider group. We have got the full gamut of young staff...The role of the middle leader is driving up standards” (Head 5)

“We’re also developing leading from the middle through LIG, so the school is going to be a hub in leading from the middle.” (Head 3)

Other Head Teachers (1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 10) have used the carousel approach to get people to share good practice at middle leader meetings with contributors at middle leader level given the responsibility to initiate discussion. Heads 2, 4 and 5 articulated that this approach leads to excellent discussion about teaching and learning practice. In Schools 7 and 9 a different approach is taken, teachers are not sent on Leading from the Middle courses but they are trained internally;

“No-one is on a middle leader course. We do train up, internally, Heads of Department, through the self-evaluation programme. There are certain responsibilities that HoDs must undertake in order to be a self-evaluating HoD. In being proficient and successful in that, they are, in effect, leading from the middle.” (Head 7)

School 9 are also thinking of adapting what they do with middle leaders, they haven’t used National College courses but instead have used the Specialist Schools Trust. This has not been as successful as they hoped as they don’t feel “part of the club” when even the analysis of results completed by the SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) does not include Grammar School data.

“In terms of courses I think we will probably opt out of the Specialist Schools Trust at the end of this year and look at something more in house, or perhaps a more coherent programme of visiting other schools, or working with other schools in terms of middle leadership.” (Head 9)
However, Heads 5 and 6 emphasised that trying to give greater ownership to middle leaders doesn’t always work universally.

"Some of it has to do with confidence, some of it has to do with “that’s the way we’ve always done things”. In terms of sustainability, that’s one whole raft of an agenda, hardly imaginative strategy, but, at the core, raising standards.” (Head 5)

“We have had a school that’s been top driven for four years, and therefore the middle team has been a little out of touch. They’ve thought – they’ll set the pace for us, and they’ll tell us what the next thing is that’s coming over the horizon. Perhaps in developing a culture we have not been as mindful as we might have been of developing middle leaders and I think that is probably the next step in this school’s development.” (Head 6)

New staffing structures under the workforce remodelling agenda have allowed some Head Teachers within this study to share their strategic vision with staff and governors, enhancing consultation of ideas on what the new staffing structure should look like.

Restructuring the workforce presented opportunities for Schools 1 and 2 to rewrite job descriptions to ensure they included key initiatives associated with each school’s development plan and the strategic direction for the learning. This helped these schools to build a consultative group of positive people who helped to push innovation forward and provided opportunities to enhance the sustainability of the models finally adopted.

Sharing leadership is an important part of sustainability and Heads 2, 3, 4, and 9 voiced that sustainability comes from people being involved in strategic thinking and strategic decisions themselves. They felt it important to have people involved and committed to the projects rather than to be concerned with who “owns” the idea.

“We’ve now got a team who’ve all got different strengths. Who aren’t competing and who are working together. I think the team is sustainable in that we’ve got pupil support represented, we’ve got personnel support represented.” (Head 3)
For School 9 sharing leadership and strategic thinking at different levels across the school has depended upon the energy and the drive of individuals to make the real difference for students.

"I think it is very much about the working with the people you have got on your team. This Leadership in depth – we all want to do that, but that’s much harder than it sounds. I think over the last few years one of the things that we have made huge progress on is giving real leadership opportunities to staff who perhaps aren’t even qualified and perhaps are only in their very early twenties and only with a year’s experience.” (Head 9)

Some people are naturally good at strategic thinking while others need to be developed to think more strategically rather than merely concentrating on the short-term goals. Heads interviewed explained how they attempt to build upon the strengths while also getting people to think more strategically about how various strategy fits in with vision and planning and day to day operations.

"It’s about sharing that view on the senior team and then beyond to middle managers so that everyone can be involved in it.” (Head 2)

Head Teacher 2 explained how the vision was painted as a clear picture of what the school would look like and how fast the school would move to get there. Interim goals were adopted and this helped to give clear goals and success markers to celebrate together on the way to the strategic vision: “You have to have a team of people who want to be there with you.” (Head 2)

For schools 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10, Specialist Status brings with it greater links and a more outward looking agenda which has helped to develop the people within the school and to build supportive external partnerships to enhance sustainable impact. Alongside this whole school strategy meetings which include support and administrative staff as well as teachers help to develop people and to secure a shared vision. Head Teachers 1, 2, 4, and 5 structured meetings and systems to monitor and ensure that SMT goes back to these issues and that middle leaders and the staff as a whole highlight the SDP areas of focus on a regular and systematic basis.

"We look at things like this and we see whether the strategies which are put in place are actually impacting in terms of monitoring and evaluation. And I take issues from there every month and tie little bits into the SEF
and slightly modify. And those issues, like the results of our monitoring and evaluation, also go to governors and are commented on in terms of whether our strategic objectives have been met or not.” (Head 1)

Developing people through networks proved to be very useful to Head Teachers in their early years in post but views as to how far they help in sustaining strategic initiatives varied according to the experience and approach of each Head Teacher.

“I think networks are useful but the dilemma I was facing was that I couldn’t leave the school long enough to get out and develop them. Because any network meant going to a meeting or going to another school and so I called on old acquaintances, and pulled in a lot of favours and asked people to come here. And networked here which was very useful, and which was how I got the seconded Assistant Head.” (Head 3)

However, Heads 6, 7 and 10 stressed that developing people through networks can be a source of conflict and political tensions were articulated by rural and urban schools alike.

“I don’t think networking is as productive as it might be...there’s still this feeling that we are a Grammar School and we have different problems and it’s (networking) not as beneficial as it might be.” (Head 10)

“...this an incredibly competitive area. Dog eat dog, falling rolls, and so it’s a situation where networks are difficult. Particularly with the 14-19 consortium is a difficult one which fragments. Competition is more sort of tribal and localised. I’m supportive of the local network but it is very localised, and it is very difficult to go beyond that. It paints a bleak picture. Lincoln is a mad place!” (Head 7)

Smaller schools found small schools networks useful for development purposes at first but felt that these tended to keep the thinking too small and didn’t provide the scope for strategic direction and support that they have found later in larger gatherings.

“When I first started here there was a small schools network which I found very, very useful. It's begun to crumble a bit now as people have left but in hindsight I think that kept my thinking small and probably wasn't a good group in terms of strategically showing me a way as Head Teacher of this school.” (Head 1)
Working with other schools to develop the people within has helped to share staffing arrangements through various Specialist School initiatives and working with primary schools has helped in understanding the larger picture in ensuring sustainability for the initiatives adopted. "The sustainability isn’t just about yourself, it’s about how you interact with other schools as well." (Head 4)

Head Teachers recognise that schools are part of a system and that strategic thinking cannot be about just developing people in one school. Even in schools where there has been little interaction with others to date there is movement towards working together to the greater good of all concerned.

"LIG has not been significant at the moment, mainly because LIG is not established here, and not had high profile. But we’re working on that and that will be better next year. We’ve now got combined LIG training on 14-19, we’ve got some subject groups meeting. That will be sustainable now, post-LIG because it’s not dependent on funding. What we’re doing is not finance led, we’re trying to build up professional partnerships." (Head 3)

Understanding the local and national politics plays a part in this for Heads interviewed and understanding the expectations of those they are accountable to has been aided by others within local networks. Many found that the best part of networking is developing relationships with people who can help to address aspects where they feel they have missed something and give contacts at County and national level where appropriate. The various Cluster Groups around the county working on the 14 – 19 strategy has promoted further meetings and enhanced the opportunities for networking in this way.

"A lot of what happens is brought on by external agencies – central government, local government, LSC. I do think that I would be crazy to think that I had any insight or power or influence over strategic developments that wasn’t impacted massively by those external agencies." (Head 7)

Forming a local Trust was of paramount importance in the minds of some of the Head Teachers interviewed (1, 4, 5 and 10) as they felt that working together with other schools to try to solve the problems of access to the 14 vocational lines would work better with closer affiliation between the schools. They all see the need for partnership and hope that a smaller group of schools from a closer geographical area
will provide opportunities that would not be possible for practical reasons across a wider area.

Sustaining themselves and others is an important part of leadership in the view of several of these Head Teachers and most, when asked about developing and sustaining themselves, felt that it was about having the time to think and reflect and the view was expressed that even journeys to and from conferences provide useful thinking time which help to rejuvenate ideas and motivate themselves and their team. Some were keen on research (Heads 2 and 4) and would like take research to a different level by encouraging more to do it and take new ideas into the classroom.

Others took the philosophical view that there comes a time when the leadership should move on;

“I’ve always believed in – you come into the school, you have a cycle, you make your mark, you have a look, you see what needs doing, you move it on, and you reach a point, where, in terms of self-sustenance and perhaps you need to look at it in another context. Some people talk about five year career cycles, or seven year cycles, and I have always been a believer in that. Because you become stale and you need fresh pairs of eyes and some people see things that you don’t see, because you take them for granted.” (Head 6)

Some of the Heads interviewed felt that a key part of sustaining themselves came from creating a balance between reading, which they enjoyed and wanted time to do more, and keeping the list of jobs manageable allowing time for other things such as exercise and recreation.

“Effective educational leaders are continuously open to new learning because the journey keeps changing.” (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2003, p.103)

Several of the Head teachers run or use the gym regularly to clear the mind but the overarching feeling on this topic from the interviews undertaken was that the life of a school leader now requires more hours in a day than they have at their disposal. However, they enjoy the challenges and the unpredictable events that add colour to their role.
There is an acceptance that the school has to carry on moving on and changing. I thrive on it and I enjoy it. It’s one of the things that I like about the job. Some of us need change in a strategic sense, that the agenda does change, that the priorities shift a little bit. Strategic direction needs to change and the vision for the school needs to be changing. I also thrive on the day to day meaty issues that occur and I enjoy the variety and the lack of predictability. It is about the personal dimension of sustaining it.” (Head 5)

Discussion Summary

The discussion from these interviews demonstrated that Head Teachers are aware that strategic leadership needs to be nurtured in others, colleagues should be able to reflect upon the school’s need to adapt to meet the challenges of the future and the concepts of the strategic developments should be, as Davies (2006, p.167) states; “part of the language and consciousness of teachers working in the school.”

“It is far more to do with your personal resources, your values. It is quite an emotional role in some respects, and it’s not the skill you have in doing a task, it’s what you bring in total in terms of presence to the role. From that point of view there comes a point in any period that you are having to look at doing things slightly differently, changing the direction of something, reinvigorating others.” (Head 5)

The Head Teachers interviewed have approached the challenges of developing their people well but all intimated that there is more to be done in this area. Some were quite far down the road but as a result could see how much further they have to travel both as an individual school and as part of a wider leadership system. Others had begun with middle managers or senior teams in distributing leadership more widely. They each have many commitments, many diversions and drains on their resources but the people agenda is an area where all feel more needs to be done.

“Leaders are the stewards of organizational energy... They inspire or demoralise others first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they mobilise, focus, invest and renew the collective energy of those they lead.” (Loehr and Schwartz, 2003, p.5)

4.5 Concluding comments on findings

Throughout this section demonstrating the findings from the semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers it has been emphasised that strategic management is central to sustainability. The chapter has identified that there are several main
themes which help to secure sustainable strategic change in practice. It has shown that sustainability is enhanced when leaders promote a strong core moral purpose that nurtures a school community in which all participants feel valued and are encouraged to develop commitment to the shared strategic vision.

The context of each school is unique and the strategic leaders within this study respect that the context changes over time. They develop strategies to take account of this as they balance the demands of achieving short term targets alongside the longer term view and they ensure that the resources and the right people are in place at the right time to sustain the impact of the changes addressed.

Considerations of a futures perspective demonstrated that individuals believed new structures should be adopted to develop new approaches to strategic development that would provide greater opportunities for sustaining improvement. The scene is changing and in the future there will be a different ethos within all schools with a more overt focus on teaching and learning. Management at all levels will take the lead in pushing forward the new initiatives and this will not be straightforward in a changing world where it is becoming even more difficult to recruit high calibre staff. The overarching feeling was that from a futures perspective we need to create an environment within schools that tells staff we are participating in these initiatives because, “...we think you are worth it ...we think staff will benefit from this and we will as well.” (Head 1)

Sustaining strategic change is not easy to either create or maintain and it has been seen through discussions within this chapter that leaders are sometimes vulnerable to external pressures that can threaten the sustainability of initiatives undertaken. In order to overcome this, the resilient leaders share leadership at all levels and demonstrate commitment to energising and developing their staff. They network widely to sustain both themselves and others and think carefully about how external initiatives fit into their strategic plan before they undertake new challenges. These themes form the focus of the taxonomy of nine principles offered for sustaining strategic change in schools in the concluding chapter that follows.
Chapter 5

Implications of the Research

This research project has established the four key elements for looking at “Sustainable Strategic Change in Practice” to be:

- Concepts of Strategy and Strategic Leadership
- Concepts of Strategic Change
- Concepts of Sustainability
- Developing a strategic role in others to make strategic change sustainable

These four key elements form the basis for all the arguments, considerations, evidence and views expressed within this project. From these elements within the literature and the findings from the semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers, this chapter offers the taxonomy of nine principles for sustaining strategic change in Schools. The taxonomy looks to preserving all that is good in a school and acknowledges that what needs to be the short term measure of progress need not be separate from that of the long term. It looks to set up systems of collaboration where a sense of trust and commitment to the values of the school are shared and where lifelong learning and a sense of morality are a central part of school ethos. The conclusions reached at the close of this chapter demonstrate that keeping these principles at the top of our agenda for change in schools will help to make any changes we make more likely to be sustainable.

Having looked at the theory and researched sustainable strategic change through the semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers, the following diagram and nine points (p.117) for achieving sustainable strategic change are offered. The diagram demonstrates how these principles are inter-related and the importance Head Teachers place on the core moral purpose being at the heart of all they do. These nine points provide a suitable format to link the literature and the framework together to make recommendations for use in schools today. The justification of why these are the major nine principles is discussed within this chapter.
5.1 Promote a strong core moral purpose for the whole school community
5.2 Develop and demonstrate commitment to a shared strategic vision with all stakeholders
5.3 Regularly take account of the context of the school as this changes over time
5.4 Develop strategies and systems to balance and focus upon both short term goals and a "strategic perspective"
5.5 Ensure resources to sustain strategic initiatives
5.6 Share and foster leadership at all levels within the school community
5.7 Show commitment through energising, developing and sustaining the staff
5.8 Practise intelligent accountability
5.9 Use networks to develop and sustain the school leadership team
These nine categories are used to examine the research findings in terms of the implications for sustainable strategic change in schools today. Each section sets out the justification for the given point within the taxonomy and the implications of the research for current practice. The chapter closes with concluding comments.

5.1 Promote a strong core moral purpose for the whole school community.

Sustainable strategic practice needs to be morally driven; we are dealing with a whole community and operating on the basis of both internal and external measures of quality assurance. The justification for including this principle within the taxonomy is that we are looking towards the greater good and creating a holistic moral vision of what constitutes a good school and good teachers. We are working to create the best learning and teaching scenario for the people that are with us now with a view to what we achieve being sustainable in the longer term. It is about treating all within the community with respect and encouraging students to have a sense of belonging and respect for themselves too. A core moral purpose is fundamental to the ethos of any successful educational establishment and although each will have their own character, in order to sustain any strategic improvements we must adapt to changing circumstances and promote a supportive, challenging and responsive environment as appropriate to the current context of the school.

MacBeath (1998, p.63) found from research that effective leaders have a clear personal vision; work alongside their colleagues; respect teachers' autonomy; anticipate change and are able to grasp the realities of the context of their school. Leaders who are able to sustain the strategic focus are always striving to improve. The findings of the research conducted by Day et al, (2000) demonstrate that Head Teachers are working within a framework of unshakeable core values and add: "Good leaders are informed by, and communicate, clear sets of personal and educational values which represent their moral purposes for the school." Day et al, (2000, p.165)

Head Teachers interviewed within this thesis emphasised that the main focus for each school regardless of size, context or type must be that the learner is at the centre of everything that is done within schools. This core moral purpose helps everyone to pull together to the same end, takes the emphasis off doing these things for someone
else and keeps everyone out to do the very best that they can for every student that sits in their classroom. Head Teachers have to prioritise and make choices from the multitude of initiatives that face them. Interviews with senior leaders emphasised that the biggest changes schools are making are in teaching and learning, as this lies at the heart of what schools are about. Head Teachers are aware that central to their role is the aim to ensure that children are achieving their potential and that their most effective strategic leadership looks to keeping the focus on learning and the core moral purpose while at the same time balancing short term goals with the strategic perspective. It was believed by school leaders that sometimes this could really happen a lot more but they are all looking to have a staff who are committed to the core moral purpose and who want to be there for the children.

Some Head Teachers have used strategic processes to promote the core moral purpose. Head 6 used the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda as the basis of the School’s Development Plan to help to ensure that the moral purpose and strategic agenda are promoted regularly to all stakeholders. In School 6 everyone is involved regularly in keeping the agenda in focus and each curriculum area makes some contribution to one of the five ECM outcomes. This helps to create alignment with the core purpose across the school and familiarises all with the school direction. Strategic change takes effort and clear thought; building ideas and vision through strategic conversations with stakeholders using the ECM agenda helped this Head Teacher to build strategic capacity and encourage others to contribute more fully to the learning community. For School 4, four strategic intents were devised as central to the purpose of the school and everything the school initiates is measured against these intents. Governors, staff and students themselves are involved to ensure that the strong moral purpose is promoted and shared by all.

In discussions with Head Teachers it is clear that for them moral purpose is about achieving the best for all within the learning community, raising standards, treating all with respect, inclusivity and equity and making an impact on the social environment not just within the individual school but across the community for all who are partners in the learning experience. Promoting a strong core moral purpose is about building and evolving an enhanced educational experience for all. It is about involving everyone in a collective endeavour that ensures that the fundamental
purpose is to provide a high quality learning environment for the greater good of all within the learning community.

5.2 Develop a shared strategic vision with all stakeholders.

Strategy can be seen as part of everyone's role in schools. If we are to be able to sustain our best work, people at all levels within the organization should be able to be involved in the design and implementation of plans for improvement. This makes the leadership role even more important as we are faced with many individuals who are responsible for various aspects and the role of the leader is to align the people with the strategic moral purpose in the context of the school. How we do this is as important as what we do if we are to succeed in empowering others to articulate the broader aims of the school.

"I don't think there is any alternative but good communication. That sounds trite, but I am very much a talker. I do try to communicate a lot of what I am thinking and what we are thinking to the staff... And to win arguments and hearts and minds, and sometimes to stick at it when people are not quite so keen." (Head 5)

Developing a shared vision with all stakeholders was seen as an important part of how Head Teachers interviewed viewed their role as School Leaders. Key strategy areas were shared in different ways from embedding key issues into everyone's job descriptions to ensuring everything is written into school documents and policies.

"So it's joined up thinking and we make sure that it is sustained." (Head 1)

Head Teachers articulated that part of it is knowing that people are feeling that they are; "on a project with you, rather than on a project for you." (Head 2) They felt that this approach aids success and sustains momentum over the longer term.

The Governing body can have an influence on the strategic context of schools at any given point in time. Each school leader interviewed had different experiences and views to report on how they demonstrate commitment to the shared strategic vision in working with Governors but the general consensus was that supportive and strategic individuals among the Governing body can help Head Teachers to introduce strategic change in the confidence that values are shared.
“The general willingness to engage and look at the next stage are less tangible but nonetheless important. I feel very positive about our governing body, our chair of governors I very much enjoy working with. He has a very sound vision of education and an understanding of what we are trying to do; an understanding that is not based on nitpicking and is wonderful to work with.” (Head 5)

“Well I think if you ask somebody what the governors’ role is they are likely to say that it is a strategic role. I think in lots of schools it isn’t. Certainly when I took over, the governors were nodding dogs and they would do whatever I said really. I can understand why they’d been trained in that way, it enabled a lot to get done, but we needed to move on from that.” (Head 4)

Sharing the leadership and working with people helps others in the school to see that strategy is not just about planning. Written plans alone do not constitute strategic leadership or sustainability. It is important that leaders look at how various strategy fits in with vision and planning and day to day operations then share that practice. For some schools it’s about sharing that view on the senior team and then beyond to middle managers, so that everyone can be involved in it. This allows a wider range of contribution and ownership among stakeholders, draws upon extended experience and expertise, builds agreement, articulates challenges to be faced and helps to create an open and reflective educational environment.

This reflection must be forward looking, emergent strategy and strategy intent which ensues from working this way can offer opportunities to think in new ways. However, the challenges for these school leaders is to be able to share and make the most of these ideas while at the same time framing them into strategic intent.

“Strategic intent is a liberating concept because it focuses on profound educational changes that can revolutionise the way we do things, and does not get bogged down in the minute detail of planning at the initial stage.” (Davies, 2006, p.162)

Developing and demonstrating commitment to the shared strategic vision demands that school leaders are able to turn these ideas into reality. Any ideas that working groups are only “talking shops” destroys their credibility and fails to bring more people on side. Strategic leaders who are looking to sustain change initiatives have to use different strategic approaches as the context within their schools change and this is considered further in the next section.
Some people are naturally good at thinking strategically, and the role of the leader is to build on the strengths of the people within the organisation and develop skills to facilitate people to think strategically.

5.3 Take account of the context of the school as this changes over time.

Literature on strategic management has an emphasis upon the importance of context, (Minzburg, 1998) and (Davies, 2005) in ensuring that leaders take account of what has gone before; what is above, below and alongside within the school situation in the here and now. The concept is effectively demonstrated in Hargreaves' (2005) analogy: "Sustainable leadership needs a rearview mirror as well as a driver's windshield." Hargreaves, (2005, p.249)

Taking account of the context of the school is included in my nine most important principles for sustainability because it is important that we look at the whole picture as we attempt to create sustainability in the face of change. Each school is different and every individual within each establishment will have their own experiences and interpretation of what the school has achieved to the present moment in time. Some will share a sense of pride in the history while others may have encountered areas of grievance which need to be addressed and mended. If we don't face the past we could find that we repeat mistakes which could have been avoided.

Schools have an important part to play in the lives and learning of their students as they look to utilizing the context of the present to equip students to deal with the challenges and changes they will face in the future. We also have a responsibility to strategically plan for our future students. Barth, (1990) conjures an effective image of this responsibility when he describes schools as "four walls surrounding the future."

A key part of leadership is to be able to deal with tensions and the views of Head Teachers demonstrated that a key part of this is dealing with the frustrations that arise with the contextual changes as they occur. The demands of each unique institution differ not only by history, personnel, community and background but size and demographic change. Responses within the interviews undertaken as part of this thesis made it evident that the scale of the school places different pressures upon the
leader. Smaller schools face the added tensions of fewer resources, fewer staff and
diverse subject specific needs in a climate of externally driven values for which they
must be accountable. Even when the contextual change is positive with rising
numbers and schools find themselves in a stronger bargaining position they must still
take account of the changing context and work alongside other schools if strategic
change and improvement is to be sustainable.

“The sustainability isn't just about yourself, it's about how you interact
with other schools as well.” (Head 1)

When things go wrong for school outside the control of the leadership team,
having this eye on the entire context helps to set up the systems and procedures
to pull through and keep the momentum going. Sustainable leaders envelope
context, ensure continuity and evoke energetic commitment to enthuse others
to adapt to change as the school moves forward. It is like pushing against an
apparently immovable rock; when we see how others are working to shift the
obstacles, pool efforts and finally overcome the issue, we are more easily able
to keep the momentum going to facilitate change in the right direction.

Contextual change can be quite frightening for people and some Head Teachers in
this study found frustrations arose in having to manage the change process while also
overcoming a “denial culture.” This is not always easy and some schools within the
project have used external advisors to help convince staff of the need to change
approaches as the context itself changes over time.

Timing is crucial to any context and where leaders are anxious about an imminent
inspection their sustainable strategy has to incorporate what to do now but also
through the long term too.

Where schools are facing serious weaknesses some Head Teachers found that it helped staff to see that change is inevitable. But although it is easier initially there always comes the time where people begin to tire and want to see “...how this floats along now for a while” (Head 2). This Head articulated that this leaves a danger of missing out on all the things that are happening and that the longer the school sits still, the further behind it falls.
The changing context is also apparent in that there are fewer high quality candidates for teaching posts at all levels, whether it is for teaching a subject, Head of Department or a Senior Team member. This raises some difficult questions about sustainability and recruitment and how the whole context will change further as the years go on. Can school leaders identify strategies that can do anything to improve this? Fullan, (2005) makes the point that if we want to change things we need to increase interaction among individuals within and across systems. Building lateral capacity across schools where leaders collaborate with other schools and organisations can help to influence changing context in a positive way. Working with other schools means that some things become more sustainable, because effectively schools are creating a bigger organisation. The context is important as schools are not working in isolation anymore.

5.4 Develop strategies and systems to balance and focus upon both short term goals and a longer term “strategic perspective”

Davies (2004) demonstrates that successful strategic leadership demands that leaders learn how to connect the past, the present and the future and identifies this as “futures orientated thinking.” He asserts that where leaders see a need to keep up to date and look for ways to challenge the current pattern they create better opportunities for the future and a shared sense of direction. With an awareness of shifting local political, social and economic forces leaders are able to set the vision and help staff to understand the connections and formulate the bigger picture for the future of the school to enhance the students’ learning.

Government initiatives such as the SEF (Self-Evaluation Form) have helped school leaders to look at things strategically. Head Teachers that use these initiatives to plan strategically can then make decisions which will take them towards their vision. The Literature Review emphasised that leaders need to have a clear vision and that although some of that vision will involve immediate decisions about what is going to happen in the short term, sustainability is about longer term strategic success. It is about leaders maintaining that vision and making sure that their school stays on course; it is about a balance of having a strategy that is going to work not only in the short term but in the long term too. The interviews with Head Teachers demonstrated that where school leaders are struggling against external odds, (such as Special
Measures), it means a strategy that has a fairly immediate impact. This is because of the scale of the problems and the short time in which the school leader has to turn things around. However, it also means keeping an eye on the future, even though in practice it is much harder for these schools to raise their head above the parapet of the daily difficulties they encounter.

Evidence from the semi-structured interviews demonstrates that schools need to provide an ethos that supports the strategic direction and fit the short term agendas within their long term plan. Short term results are necessary to build public trust, Governments want to see the impact of money provided in the short term, parents want to see league tables to make sure they make the right academic choice for their child and the students’ experience itself is short term moving between weekly test results to monthly and termly assessment reports. Working on Assessment For Learning as opposed to Assessment of Learning helps to create a better learning frame but nevertheless the students are always looking for short term gain. Leaders must do their best for the students in their school now while at the same time setting strategic goals over the longer term.

“Create the virtuous circle where public education delivers results, the public gains confidence and is therefore willing to invest through taxation and, as a consequence, the system is able to improve further. It is for this reason that the long-term strategy requires short-term results.”
(Barber, 2004, p.25)

Long term strategy is integrated with short term operational planning; short term achievement is not sustainable without longer term strategic approaches and leaders are only able to achieve long term goals if the school has established a basis of trust and confidence with stakeholders through measurable shorter term effectiveness.

5.5 Ensure resources to sustain strategic initiatives
Sustainable strategic change is enduring; it draws on resources and support to ensure that the anticipated change is both successful and worthwhile. This principle is included as it became evident in the interviews that Head Teachers felt this is a key success factor in sustaining strategic change in their schools. They felt that leaders can not afford to let the resources become depleted and that principles of best value are required to help to sustain the resource pool itself. We can not squander resources on “one day wonders” that take away from the needs of others. Successful schools
focus investment on building longer term strategic improvement by developing the skills and capacity of their people to take initiatives forward.

Each school is different; some are more ready to deal with the challenges that strategic change brings than others and some have the resources, resilience and expertise to engage and sustain the learning community more easily than others. However, whatever the starting point, all must adopt strategies to ensure sufficient resources if the initiatives adopted are to last over time.

Sustaining strategic change demands that Head Teachers are able to draw upon materials, time, space, use of support staff and advice to ensure that the anticipated change is both successful and worthwhile. Head Teachers throughout the process were keen to assert that this is a key success factor in sustaining strategic change in their schools. They felt that leaders need also to have a good grasp of what it is possible to achieve and the courage and determination to share leadership with others by developing the skills and capacity in their teams to ensure that the best possible use is made of all resources within the school.

"...in this school, and I suppose in most of the other small schools, there is severe pressure from outside in terms of best value. The school has to show particularly that results are good, it can attract students, and that financially it can actually run itself as well. So when we embark upon strategies we have to be very, very sure that we can sustain them financially." (Head 1)

Financial resources cause the greatest frustration for school leaders:

"Four per cent per pupil guarantee sounds great, it is above the rate of inflation, except you only get four per cent on that per pupil bit of your budget share and on the rest you get no increase so you only get two per cent overall." (Head 4)

It is a difficult balancing act for these Head Teachers who seek to provide the very best education for the students yet find their resources cut back in real terms year on year. One of the biggest arguments that Head Teachers raise is the fact that they can not be sustainable in anything without knowing how they are going to plan financially over the next few years. Financial constraints sometimes prevent any guarantee of long term strategic action being followed through even where leaders
are positive and forward thinking in their approach and can hinder longer term appointments:

“For Year 7 next year we are employing someone, for three days a week, just to work on literacy and numeracy, but I can only appoint for 12 months.” (Head 3)

These Head Teachers are doing their best to create opportunities that will open other gates to the future but they are sometimes struggling to acquire sufficient resources to ensure that the strategies they are putting in place will be sustainable over the longer time frame. The largest part of the budget share is spent on staffing and consequently the people within are one of the key resources for school leaders; to make the most of this resource and to ensure that we sustain all that is good in schools leaders must make best use of collaborative opportunities. Fullan, (2005) refers to the importance of sustaining energy levels of the people within the organisation and refers to “cyclical energising” as a fundamental element of sustaining strategic practice. Positive cultures where staff work together collaboratively can lead to better practice but it is important that we avoid burn out and make the most of the people resource within our learning community.

The Head Teachers interviewed within this project are highly principled individuals who value the contribution of the people within their organisations. Their best practice demonstrates people centred continuing professional development and analytical and reflective consideration of strategic measures undertaken. Politics will always have a part to play in the management of schools and managing the school tensions and situations caused by lack of resources is a characteristic of effective strategic leadership.

5.6 Share and foster leadership at all levels within the school community
Sustainability is about leaders understanding the nature of learning capacity and committing the school to promoting enquiry, emphasising the importance of professional development, distributing leadership in an appropriate way and providing positive reinforcement of the learning values throughout the school.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that the schools within this study share leadership in different ways and while some involve students in having a say in how effective
lessons are, some decided they needed more people on the Senior Leadership Team who would work beyond 1265, and who would add weight to various areas. For others the leadership has been distributed over a larger group and included Governors in the strategic management of the school.

"- it’s quite a large group. Nearly a third of the staff. So the sharing of ideas in here, go beyond this room. We’ve also taken the same approach with Governors, and with Governors we have a Strategic Management Committee, made up of the Heads of all committees and a lot of the main work is done there.” (Head 2)

The additive form of distributed leadership as identified by Gronn (2003, p.679) is concerned with the dispersal of tasks among people within the organisation while the holistic form focuses on the interdependence of these leaders and like the constructivist view of leadership it places importance on the reciprocal learning processes that are the outcome of shared understanding. As we move to sustain our strategic initiatives, building trust and a shared sense of purpose becomes a catalyst to feed into the strategic motivation and enhance the opportunities for that motivation to sustain itself to add greater value to the school’s strategic outcomes.

"We have a simple but formal reflection mechanism and feed that into planning and strategy. We are also trying to make sure that everybody on the Senior Team has as part of their role, the analytical responsibility to look at things and to unpick them and say what was the effect of this, is it sustainable, did it work, does it need to be changed.” (Head 4)

Shared leadership demands priorities to be made concerning the boundaries of the leadership community and any professional development programme must involve a discussion of these and issues of organisational culture and change. Individuals who have appropriate opportunity to analyse the nature of situations leaders find themselves in and are given appropriate training are more likely to face these new roles with confidence and enthusiasm. As Fullan, (2005, p.29) advocates:

"Sustainability is a team sport, and the team is large.”

5.7 Show commitment through energising, sustaining and renewing both ourselves and others.

The justification for including 5.7 within the taxonomy is that evidence from both the literature review and the semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers show that when we give teachers the opportunity to work together, share good practice, share
strategic ideas and learn from each other, we are more likely to achieve sustainable improvement through an internal search for meaning, relevance and connection. It is about providing challenge without exhausting the team; renewing the organisation through a commitment to achievement without losing the goodwill of the staff.

Discussions with Head Teachers within this study have demonstrated that this is not always easy. One Head faced a lot of negativity within a strong “Union” school when staff training was offered to all in an attempt to demonstrate commitment to sustaining the people within the organisation. Only ten accepted the offer and the consequences for the individuals accepting the training were not pleasant;

“...they’ve been picketed on the stairs and been told that they’re brown noses for going to voluntary training. So that’s what they’ve come through and so they’ve needed support and told that they’re doing the right thing and don’t be brow beaten.” (Head 3)

Sustaining, energising and renewing staff demands that leaders not only say the right thing but that they do the right thing at the right time and in the right way. In itself this is a tall order for any Head but it is especially difficult for someone new to the school who needs to learn the entire context of the establishment before the threat of OFSTED or special measures raise their head. External scrutiny of schools creates other tensions and Head Teachers find themselves in the midst of external bodies promoting change and their own school staff who need to play a big part in the implementation of initiatives. If these tensions are not handled well staff morale can be affected and little progress will be made.

In difficult circumstances such as these, some leaders are looking to personal survival and have little left for renewing and sustaining themselves as they fire fight issues in the early days of Headship. “As far as me being sustainable...it was dealing with day to day and getting through day to day.” (Head 3)

However, school leaders acknowledged that sustaining themselves is essential if they are to make strategic planning work and for many this comes from finding time to think and reflect. Many miss the opportunity to read as widely as they would like and for all, regardless of school size and context, the demands of Headship are great.
“When you take on a Headship, in the first two or three years, I think the school owns you. The costs are immense.” (Head 6)

“I do a lot of reading, but there aren’t enough hours in the day to do the job, and so something gives because of that. I’m already looking at my list of things for the summer holiday and thinking I’m not going to have enough time to fit them all in.” (Head 4)

At a time when the Workload agreement is intended to create a better work-life balance for teaching staff, increased workload demands and further external requirements on school leaders have created greater tensions and longer working hours. Most Head Teachers in this study are successfully dealing with these demands but recognised that it is not without some cost and effective leaders see that it is important to make efforts to sustain themselves and others.

As leaders they consider the views of the learners (both students and teachers), challenge beliefs, encourage interaction and try to make the learning process purposeful for all. These Head Teachers who provide teachers with opportunities to develop their sense of vision and purpose find their staff are “renewed” by having chance to review their existing habits and practice. They find that this helps to develop their capacity to enhance the improvements within the school for a more sustainable outcome.

5.8 Practise intelligent accountability

Schools have to be accountable on several fronts: to parents, governors, community and society itself, but leaders who practise intelligent accountability are able to ensure that this is done in a way which helps to raise standards and moves the school forward towards its strategic goals without allowing itself to become overburdened with bureaucracy. Relationships are based upon trust and collaboration rather than micro-management and data is used as a tool to reach those goals. Data is necessary for sustainable improvement when it is used to ensure the improvement of the learning environment and it can provide school leaders with a wealth of information to take strategic change forward. However, it must be the slave and not the master and as in other areas of school management we must ensure that everything we do works to the good of the shared moral purpose of the school. Leaders have to deliver short term targets, but when we place these within our larger long term plan for the
school, we can use them as diagnostic tools to help our establishment meet strategic
goals for sustainable improvement.

“Most educators want to be held accountable, but they don’t want to be
held responsible for things over which they have no control such as
poverty, inadequate budgets, run down school buildings, and transient
students.” (Fink, 2005, p.9)

Self evaluation within schools to lead into the inspection framework has helped
leaders to reflect upon the way they work with staff and helped to place a greater
emphasis on scrutinising performance within the school creating greater
responsibility for the way the establishment improves. This goes some way towards
intelligent accountability as it allows the leader to have more focus on how to
develop relationships within the school to reach the targets set and is also more
sustainable as we place schools themselves behind the wheel rather than all jumping
on the same bus as we strive for sustainable school improvement.

School leaders interviewed articulated that they are keen to ensure that any strategic
intent they adopt is directly related to the learning for students. For School 4 this
means measuring everything that takes place against their four strategic intents;
“curriculum, finance, developing learning skills for students and behaviour to
support learning.” Experienced and confident leaders were prepared to accept what
they need for the school and refuse to run with initiatives that do not take their
strategic intentions forward. These institutional needs give the school leaders the
impetus to make the initiatives which suit the strategic goals of the school work
through the commitment of the learning community to the values and vision
established.

Increasingly, the Head Teachers within this study are finding that policy
interventions and external initiatives can utilise too much of their time and they are
being more selective in those that they follow. They use their leadership skills to
select what is appropriate, support their staff fully in implementing those that are
accepted and continue to promote the core values in the way they address these
issues.
Sustainable strategic change involves intelligent accountability, increasing and enhancing school capacity and developing ownership of initiatives alongside external accountability. Networks do build in shared commitment and accountability to some extent and collaborative cultures can be demanding because they are responding to the views of peers. However, the self evaluation now part of the toolkit used by schools and OFSTED is intended to give schools greater ownership while still remaining accountable to external parties.

"the Government and its partners at local and national level will increasingly use the information provided by a school’s self evaluation and development plan, alongside inspection, to inform outcomes about targeting support and challenge." (Miliband, 2004, p.8)

5.9 Use networks to develop and sustain the school leadership team

The literature review established that using networks at both local and national level is considered to be a major factor in forging strategic alliances that help to develop ideas and knowledge within the school leadership team. All Head Teachers interviewed recognised that this is an important part of creating the right climate for sustainable strategic change but the term itself elicited a mixed response.

Some explained that they didn’t like the word “networking” particularly when they attend a conference and people give time for this activity. However, leaders were keen to articulate that it is just what they do anyway in talking to people and building relationships.

“I think people are starting to understand that you can have mutually beneficial partnerships, rather than partnerships which are just about what you can get from somebody else and that those partnerships will benefit the students – that’s what’s important. Networking is really important. The National College produces any number of bits of paper about how important networking is, but people have always done it and always will, whether it has a label or not. Particularly going 14-19, you just can’t do it on your own.” (Head 4)

This term represented local politics to some heads who saw networking as the opportunity to build support groups in order to share ideas with other individuals in a similar position.
Networking from my point of view at the moment is more to do with understanding your place in the county. Understanding the politics. Understanding the expectations - who you are accountable to. The best part of networking for me is that the people I have developed relationships with are people who I can share some of the angst with.” (Head 2)

Senge (1999) identified three types of organisational leaders; “executive leaders, line leaders and network leaders” and he emphasises that the informal/network leaders have greater flexibility to cross-organisational boundaries and promote whole-school initiatives. Head Teachers within this study who were feeling “besieged” found it was difficult to get out of school to forge these alliances. They resorted to bringing people into their establishment, but this in itself seems to demonstrate the importance of networking.

School networks that develop and sustain the school leadership team create links and connections through which leaders work to influence and achieve organizational goals. It is about contributing to the network to connect with others rather than to command and control what is taking place. Formal leaders should utilise the school’s informal networks to enhance their own skills and to promote teacher leadership, which will in turn enhance the school’s capacity for learning.

Forging strategic alliances helps to develop broad sets of ideas and knowledge. Working with others also helps to build a strategic map of the current situation enabling the school to successfully move forward. Perhaps when Head Teachers have opportunity to stand back, to share ideas and share experiences they are less likely to feel that they are sinking as they try to bring their ship to safer shores.

Concluding comments
The study has highlighted that sustainability is about sustaining all that is good in a school and that what needs to be the short term measure of progress need not be separate from that of the long term. We should follow the principles of intelligent accountability and ensure that whatever we do, we adopt change for the right reasons and not merely for the appeasement of the world outside the school. When we empower people to grow and develop in the complex environment that is the norm for schools today, we can set up systems of collaboration where a sense of trust and commitment to the values of the school are shared. Lifelong learning and a sense of
morality are in themselves sustaining; keeping these principles at the top of our agenda for change in schools helps to make any changes we make as a consequence to this more likely to be sustainable.

Sustainability is about leaders understanding the nature of learning capacity and committing the school to promoting enquiry, emphasising the importance of professional development, distributing leadership in an appropriate way and providing positive reinforcement of the learning values throughout the school.

"Sustainability...a fundamental principle for enriching and preserving the richness and interconnectedness of all life, and learning lies at the very heart of high-quality life." (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, p.9)

The role of leadership within schools is to keep a relentless focus upon student learning to generate the conditions and climate for improvement to be initiated and sustained. It is to act as a catalyst in creating a learning environment for both teachers and pupils.

"To cope with a changing world, any entity must develop the capability of shifting and changing, of developing new skills and attitudes: in short the capability of learning... the essence of learning is the ability to manage change by changing yourself – as much for people when they grow up as for companies when they live through turmoil." (De Gues, 1997, p.20)

Sustainable strategic improvement is about change for the “good” of the school community; it demands a clear moral purpose and committed relationships which cultivate a school environment that has the capacity to continue to improve. Sustainability is not just about creating change that can last, it is about developing initiatives that stand the test of time without compromising ourselves or others. In education we do not want to keep everything, (as some things we try may not be worth keeping), but we look to sustain the change that is in itself “sustaining”.
Bibliography


