MIDDLE LEADERSHIP

OF TEAMS IN LARGE NEW ZEALAND

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

By

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ABSTRACT

Middle leaders of teams in New Zealand secondary schools are vital to the quality of teaching and learning and a large amount of responsibility for the leadership of learning practice has been passed on to middle leaders. The problem is that middle leaders of teams need to work closely with their colleagues to improve pedagogy and raise student achievement levels, yet middle leaders are still being overloaded with the day-to-day administrative tasks.

Within this context, my qualitative research, involving four large New Zealand secondary schools takes place. Two data gathering methods were employed: an open-ended questionnaire to senior leaders and Heads of Faculty and four focus groups involving curriculum Heads of Department. Three key research questions guiding this study were: What are the expectations of middle level team leaders? Secondly, what are the challenges of middle level team leaders while performing their role? Thirdly, how do middle level team leaders deal with these challenges?

The thematic findings revealed that middle leaders of teams are struggling with issues of work overload, role ambiguity, and the challenges of leading teams to achieve their objectives. This study indicated that middle leaders are ill-prepared and require support in order to fulfill a role that is changing from managing to leading teams.

This study highlights the need for principals to cultivate and develop new and existing middle leaders within their institutions and for the Ministry of Education to consider designing, in consultation with middle leaders, a professional development programme that will support, enhance and sustain middle leadership in New Zealand secondary schools.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIE	Cambridge International Examination
HODs	Heads of Department
HOFs	Heads of Faculty
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TCR	Teacher with Curriculum Responsibility
UREC	Unitec Research Ethics Committee

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

In large New Zealand secondary schools a hierarchical structure exists whereby middle leaders have a direct role in improving teaching and learning within their Faculties. It is essential that middle leaders work "with and through colleagues" (Southworth, 2004) to improve pedagogy and improve the learning outcomes for students, hence a need to work closely with others. According to Robinson (2006), by keeping teachers' development and learning at the forefront of education there should be improved student outcomes as she states "it will ground leadership in the core business of teaching and learning" (p. 34).

Middle leaders in New Zealand secondary schools dominate the structure of the school organisation when a hierarchical structure exists. The principal is at the apex and a vertical and horizontal division of labour exists underneath them (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007). Middle leaders have formal responsibilities and accountabilities for the organisation and their own departments, alongside a significant teaching load, being responsible for 10 or more staff and the teaching and learning of hundreds of students (Dinham, 2007; Harris, 2000).

Today leaders are now "held responsible for student outcomes – for actual student success with more rigorous curriculum demands than ever before" (Starratt, 2003, p. 6) which has led management to be more focused on educational concerns. This is highly relevant with the 2010 revised New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) which is currently being implemented and the new matrix for the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) subjects beginning in 2011 within New Zealand secondary schools. Consequently, Starratt (2003) asserts that "the core work of school leaders must be

involved with teachers in seeking to promote quality learning for all children, and that management tasks serve that core work" (p.11).

Southworth's (2004) learning-centred leadership focuses on learning and teaching with a stronger emphasis on learning than previously held. He describes this leadership as a process of influencing teachers to develop, improve and change their teaching and pupil's learning in the classroom. It has more to do with changing teacher's professional practice. This is indicative of the revised NZC whereby teachers' practice is at the forefront of improving teaching and learning in the classroom. The key competencies included in the revised NZC are: thinking; using language; symbols and texts; relating to others; managing self; and, participating and contributing. These combine a range of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that focus on developing qualities and competencies for learning and for life (MOE, 2007). These competencies underpin the pedagogical shifts in teaching as the NZC recognises that how we teach is integral to what we teach (MOE, 2007).

Rationale

Middle leaders in New Zealand secondary schools are vital to the quality of teaching and learning (Fitzgerald, Gunter, & Eaton, 2006) and a large amount of responsibility for the leadership of learning practice has been passed on to teachers who are in the position of middle leadership in schools. As a consequence of recent curriculum changes their roles and interactions have become increasingly complex, perhaps causing them to be not as effective as they could be. Middle leaders are now being held responsible for student outcomes and success with more rigorous curriculum demands (Starratt, 2003, p. 6) which has led to issues involving: an overload of work, multiple layers of middle leaders and possibly confusion surrounding what is expected of these leaders.

School middle leadership has "become an important focus of attention for research and development" (Bennett, Woods, Wise, & Newton, 2007, p. 453) in recent years. While there has been some research done in England on the role of middle leaders, namely Heads of Faculty (HOFs) and Heads of Departments (HODs), there has been little done in New Zealand (Feist, 2008), hence, a need for more research to be completed in the area of middle leadership in New Zealand secondary schools. Middle leaders need a voice.

Principals of large New Zealand secondary schools therefore need middle leaders to work closely with their colleagues to improve pedagogy within their faculties. Within New Zealand's current context, if teaching and learning is a key focus within education, then obviously a key focus for curriculum middle leaders should be on effective pedagogy in order to raise achievement levels, yet they are still getting overloaded with the day-to-day managerial tasks. As Fitzgerald (2009) asserts "management tasks and activities dominate teacher's work and that there is, consequently little or no time for leadership" (p. 51). It is within this context that my research takes place, whereby principals rely on middle leaders to raise student levels of achievement through improving teaching practice within their faculties, yet middle leaders are struggling with issues of work overload, role ambiguity and the challenges of leading teams to achieve the necessary school-wide and curriculum objectives.

This investigation will be timely and informative as the knowledge gained from this study could enhance the understanding of these complex roles and inform educationalists on how middle leaders in particular operate and work in their teams, as they face the challenges and tensions within a current New Zealand secondary school context. Cardno (2002) suggests there is minimal review of teams yet there is a high incidence of teams in New Zealand schools. Although there is evidence of permanent and structural teams in New Zealand schools such as the faculty teams, there is a significant gap in the literature base. Additionally, little recent research focuses on the place of

teams and relationships, since "there is little published research on the incidence or effectiveness of teamwork in schools" (Cardno, 2002, p. 213).

Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the topic of middle leadership of teams in New Zealand secondary schools by providing new knowledge that contributes to the knowledge base on educational leadership. My aim was to explore the complexity and challenges of middle team leadership interactions and experiences within the role of middle level team leaders in large New Zealand secondary schools.

The research centres on three key research questions:

1. What are the expectations of middle level team leaders?
2. What are the challenges of middle level team leaders while performing their role?
3. How do middle level team leaders deal with these challenges?

Thesis Outline

Chapter one briefly outlines the research study and considers the rationale for study outlining the research aims, key questions and settings of the research.

Chapter two provides a critical view of a body of literature from New Zealand and international research with regards to middle leadership, including the concepts of distributed leadership and teamwork.

Chapter three outlines the research design, the methods used, sampling and data analysis used in the study. It justifies the qualitative approach utilised to allow for a range of differing perspectives, which have provided rich, deep and interpretive data. The chapter also addresses research validity and reliability with regard to triangulation and ethical considerations are examined.

Chapter four outlines the research findings and provides a robust and rigorous analysis of the data gathered from the two data gathering methods; an open-ended questionnaire with senior leaders and Heads of Faculty and focus groups with Heads of Department. The findings are organised according to the themes identified.

Chapter five contains a discussion of the findings and integrates these with references to the literature base identified in chapter two.

Chapter six presents conclusions and lists further recommendations for practice. Limitations of the research process undertaken and possible future foci for research are addressed.

Summary

This introductory chapter has laid the foundations for the subsequent thesis. It has introduced the research aims, questions and settings with a brief discussion of the rationale for study. The role of middle leader has been described as a complex one in which they face challenges and tensions within the current context as they strive to improve learning outcomes for students whilst working with others to achieve their goals. This thesis now begins to focus on the literature base which explores the middle leader's role in detail, along with how middle leaders work in teams to improve collaborative practice and ultimately better outcomes for students.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature base on middle leadership and management constantly alludes to the fact that middle leaders are vital to the quality of teaching and learning (Fitzgerald, Gunter & Eaton, 2006). A large amount of responsibility for the leadership of learning practice has been passed on to teachers who are in the position of middle leadership in schools, largely due to the concept of distributed leadership. This chapter focuses on the literature base which includes the role and expectations of the middle leader of secondary school curriculum teams, the challenges they face whilst performing their role as leader of department teams and how they deal with these challenges. Themes emerging from the literature include; the concept of distributed leadership, leadership versus management, the middle leader's role, changes to their role which has led to role intensification and ambiguity and, the challenges facing middle leaders of department teams.

THE CONCEPT OF MIDDLE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Distribution of Leadership

Today's schools are now facing a different dilemma than they did in the 1990s when principals and teachers were struggling to cope with widespread reform that they believed took their focus away from teaching and learning (Youngs, 2008). Now, the dilemma faced is slightly different since educational workload intensification can be due to the "external initiative overload that focuses on student learning" (Youngs, 2008, p. 2) with the revised New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) and an intentional emphasis on improving pedagogy. Furthermore, Youngs (2007) asserts that with the intensification for leaders brought about by the NZC the "environment has been ripe to distribute

leadership across a school's professional staff" (p. 3). Schools are having to do more with less funding from the Government and within schools there is a "greater distribution and intensification of leadership work" (Youngs, 2008, p. 2) as principals struggle to balance their complex and demanding roles. Therefore it is no surprise that terms such as distributed leadership have become popular and have been offered in a way as solutions to overworked educational leaders (Youngs, 2008). Distributed leadership has been offered as one of the ways to cope in the current context, yet it does not mean it is the best way, especially if distributed leadership becomes limited to delegating leadership onto others (Youngs, 2008) thereby causing "distributed pain" (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 535). By placing extra demands and tasks on others, namely middle leaders this common interpretation of distributed leadership becomes a form of delegation (Harris, 2008; Youngs, 2007).

The size of a school does make a difference to the way in which improving teacher's practice is carried out. It will be shared or more commonly, 'distributed' to members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) or middle leaders. As a school increases in size there is a need for more leaders to exercise learning-centred leadership in order to sustain the "density of leadership" (Southworth, 2004, p. 118). Therefore it is necessary for larger schools to ensure that strong structures and systems are in place to support middle leaders in the process of exercising this form of learning-centred leadership which in effect has been distributed from above. If improving student outcomes through improved teaching practice is the aim, then the common principles that emerge from distributed leadership such as: being broad-based; encompassing formal and informal leaders; vertical and lateral leadership structures; being flexible; fluid and versatile while ultimately being concerned with improving leadership practice in order to improve teaching and learning (Harris, 2008), schools should rise to the challenge and build leadership capacity by extending it and developing it for the future leaders of the school. This is an ongoing challenge for school leaders as they try to "locate, develop and sustain committed and talented leadership" (Harris, 2008, p. 3).

Furthermore, Fitzgerald et al. (2006) acknowledge that middle leaders are integral to the quality of teaching and learning and believe that learning-centred leadership occurs at all levels of the school. This would indicate that a highly collaborative and trusting environment would need to develop in order for all staff to be involved in leadership of learning, where leadership is distributed, especially to middle leaders. In reality, this is easier said than done. If distributed leadership has the potential to broaden our understanding of school leadership interactions and allows us to "suspend and possibly relinquish our conventional views of leadership it is worth pursuing" (Harris, 2008, p. 5). But if it is just a form of delegation in disguise then it will have negative effects such as dumping the workload onto others – primarily middle leaders who are centred in the middle of the school hierarchy.

In contrast to the positive, sharing and highly collaborative nature of distributed leadership which is more evident in Fitzgerald et al. (2006) and Southworth's (2004) literature, Woods, Bennett, Harvey and Wise's (2004) study of distributed leadership opens up the boundaries of leadership but this poses questions such as how wide should the boundary be set? Which group of stakeholders are counted as being in the net of distributed leadership? Which individuals within these groups do or should contribute to distributed leadership? Where do student leaders fit in? Woods et al. (2004) point out that distributed leadership is the "idea that leadership is a property of groups of people, not an individual" (p. 229) which is "strongly dependent on circumstances" (p. 451). Hence, context is extremely important as the structure and practice of this type of leadership will be influenced by what is possible and appropriate in different contexts. This form of leadership according to Woods et al. (2004) has a high degree of team work, emphasises collaboration, open communication and strong shared goals and beliefs. But what if there is a lack of communication and strong leadership from the middle leader? Expectations need to be clear from the out-set otherwise what sounds like a great way of leading can become flawed.

Leadership versus Management

Described as 'linking pins' (Collier, Dinham, Brennan, Deece & Mulford, 2002), 'conduits' (Feist, 2008), 'meat in the sandwich' (Fitzgerald, 2000), or the "archetypal 'piggy in the middle' of school leadership" (Kerry, 2005, p. 72) a common thread runs through the literature. Middle leaders - are just that. They are part of a hierarchy where they are situated in the middle, reporting upwards to senior leaders and seeking to lead a department of staff (Dinham, 2007). In New Zealand, middle leaders are given re-numeration in the form of Management Units which are currently $4000 and a time allowance of between one and four hours per week as recognition for their role (PPTA National Office, 2007). Middle leaders are seen to be struggling with a re-conceptualisation of their positions suggests Cranston (2006) whereby tension underpins the middle leader's role which is situated within the conflict between departmental management and subject leadership (Kerry, 2005). This tension will be developed further in the review.

Middle leaders regardless of being labelled Head of Faculty (HOF) or Head of Department (HOD) are primarily responsible for organising the teaching and learning within their school on a day-to-day basis. According to Jarvis (2008) "the purely managerial tasks of middle leaders have often been seen to constitute the bulk of their role" (p. 29) while the opportunities for middle leaders to "demonstrate transformational leadership of their teams appears to be rare at best" (p. 29) and therefore raises the question; Has an opportunity for middle leadership been lost? This critical view of Jarvis' is also echoed by Fitzgerald's New Zealand study (2009) which reveals that management tasks and activities dominate the work of middle leaders and that there is "consequently little or no time for leadership" (p. 51). Cranston (2006) also finds that Australian middle leaders are extremely busy people who work "long hours and are under considerable pressure in roles that have changed and are changing" (p. 9). His research supports the claim that the middle leader's leadership potential is unrealised in schools.

The Middle Leader's Role in Secondary Schools

Within the secondary school organisation, a hierarchical structure commonly exists, whereby the principal is at the apex and a vertical and horizontal division of labour exists underneath them (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007). Between the SLT and teachers, HOFs and HODs of curriculum areas dominate the structure and their main tasks focus on the leadership of teaching and the learning of students (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007). The role of the secondary school middle leader sits within the hierarchy of management and overtime has been assigned a variety of labels such as; 'teachers in charge', 'Heads of Department' (HODs) or 'Faculty' (HOFs), 'middle manager', 'school leader' or more recently 'middle leader' in New Zealand (Fitzgerald, 2009; Bennett et al., 2007). Schools are held accountable for every aspect of the education they provide. According to Brown, Rutherford and Boyle (2000) this has led to middle leadership being instrumental in developing successful schools. Brown et al. (2000) assert that the department is the key "focus for change within a school" (p. 242) and that middle leaders with responsibility for a group of people " can enable successful change within the group and thus contribute to show school improvement" (p. 242). In the current New Zealand context the revised NZC and new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) matrix, change is occurring and middle leaders therefore play an important role in initiating and sustaining these pedagogical changes.

The literature base generates the argument that middle leaders are vital to developing successful departments and schools (Brown & Rutherford, 1998) and fundamental in improving the quality of teaching and learning (Fitzgerald et al., 2006) yet within their role middle leaders are preoccupied with "routine administration and crisis management and have little time for strategic thinking" (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; p. 76). A research study conducted in 1998 by Brown and Rutherford to examine the changing role of the head of department in United Kingdom secondary schools summarised Murphy's (1992) leadership typology as a basis for categorising and giving insight into the role. The Table below illustrates the leadership typology used.

Table 1.1: A Summary of Murphy's Leadership Typology

HODs as *Servant Leader*	*HODs as* *Organisational* *Architect*	*HODs as* *Moral Educator*	*HODs as* *Social* *Architect*	*HODs as* *Leading* *Professional*
To lead not by control but by empowering teachers to release their creative abilities.	*Flatter structures where leadership is shared to promote a greater degree of ownership and therefore a more committed department.*	*A need to be motivated by a set of deep personal values and beliefs.*	*Sensitivity and a need to construct social networks to address the worsening conditions confronting students and their families.*	*To be up-to-date with curriculum developments and be a very competent teacher to retain credibility with colleagues.*

Source: Brown and Rutherford, 1998, p.78.

Brown and Rutherford (1998) found that the five roles were mutually supportive and were interconnected. They argue that it is clear that the priority of the HOD has to give to each of the roles must be "geared to the immediate needs of the department and also of course the school" (p. 86) therefore the context of the school and the team is imperative to the leadership interactions of the middle team leader. They found that there was a great deal of evidence whereby middle leaders served the needs of the department in a routine and ordinary way, for example, organising the work of a sick colleague. That middle leaders were working to change the culture of the department from a traditional to a more collegial one, that values were demonstrated with middle leaders able to 'walk the talk' while there was a sensitivity to the needs of pupils and staff within the school and department. Finally, they noticed that the middle leader spent at "least 80% of their time actually teaching which is considered their main professional role" Brown & Rutherford, 1998, p. 83) while the rest of the time was spent leading and managing the department. It can be concluded therefore that although the majority of time was spent on teaching, coaching and managing their department there was evidence of them acting in Murphy's (1992) five leadership roles which allows for categorising and providing insight into the complex role of middle leadership.

The role of middle leadership in secondary schools has received less attention and research than that of senior leadership and classroom teachers (Collier et al., 2002; Cranston, 2006; Dinham, 2007; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). But what comes through strongly in the literature base is the "dual, intermediary function of the HOD who must provide leadership for a group of people....while being part of the higher executive of the school" (Collier et al., 2002, p. 18). Described as "linking pins between their departments and the upper executive" (Collier et al., 2002; p.19) this crucial position means the middle leader must both guide and drive educational change within the school. Faculties and subject departments "provide structures and channels for managing the teaching and learning of students and staff" (Busher & Harris, 1999, p. 313). Within large New Zealand secondary schools subject departments there is commonly a two-tiered middle leadership structure with HOFs and HODs leading these teams.

A distinction can be made between both roles according to Feist's (2008) New Zealand research whereby the HOF acts as a "conduit for senior management" (p. 60) to ensure that decisions and policies are communicated to the other leaders (HODs) within the faculty. Alongside this 'conduit' role was the significant role of subject leadership whilst also maintaining the co-ordination of teams within a "large faculty structure across diverse departments" (p. 66). By combining several HODs under one faculty the tensions for the middle leader can be lessened by splitting the role of leadership and management (Kerry, 2005). While the HOD of individual subjects provides the management aspect of the role for example; keeping records, checking outcomes, being accountable for the performance of staff the HOF can undertake the focus on leadership of the faculty (Kerry, 2005). This is perhaps easier said than done however, as it can create further tension by extending the power base for a small number of individuals. What if the faculty leader is non-communicative? The other middle leaders could then find themselves in a role where they are unsure of how much they should be doing, creating role ambiguity between HOFs and HODs. It is also evident that HOFs also fulfill the role of an HOD of a subject area for example; Head of the English Faculty

which also encompasses the role of English Head of Department. This adds further complexity, tension and pressure to the middle leader's role.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF MIDDLE TEAM LEADERSHIP

Role intensification and workload

Education in secondary schools has become both complex and intense as has the role of the middle leader (Dinham, 2007). In today's current climate, with rapid changes and increasingly high expectations middle leaders are faced with a plethora of administrative tasks (Brown, et al., 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2006). A study by Brown et al. (2000) generated evidence to confirm that middle leaders have been asked to take on extra responsibilities that were in the past commonly accepted as being with the SLT's domain. These added responsibilities were not matched with "either sufficient authority or adequate time to enable them to be carried out properly" (p. 249). Indeed, during the past decade in England where there has been an increase in the multiplicity of management tasks due to comprehensive changes, pressure has been put on principals and senior leaders to delegate downwards to the middle (Brown et al., 2000). Fitzgerald's (2007) New Zealand study also points out that the "intensification of work teachers have experienced in recent times as a result of changes to curricula in New Zealand has been pushed downwards" (p. 61). This shift has occurred at a number of levels, "from the centre to the local level and then within schools from the apex of the hierarchy (the principal) to the middle" (p. 61).

Although an English study by Brown et al. (2000), much can be compared to what is currently happening within New Zealand's secondary school context. The demands of the revised NZC and changes to NCEA mean middle leaders are somewhat of a buffer between their colleagues and the National Curriculum. Added to this, the increasing demands for accountability in terms of pressure to improve student outcomes and exam results has led to an increase in record keeping, report writing, marking and moderating.

Within New Zealand, Fitzgerald (2000) asserts that middle leaders are now responsible for "additional activities such as staff appraisal, development of quality assurance mechanisms and the evaluation of teaching programmes" (p. 71). These are all inextricably entwined with the increasing focus on teaching and learning with "accountability for the achievement of student outcomes being incrementally devolved to middle leaders" (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 72). Thus, middle leaders are occupied with a range of tasks and responsibilities that require them to be responsive to pressures for the improvement of student outcomes (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 5) in both a New Zealand or United Kingdom context. Middle leaders are in a critical position where the administrative tasks and activities as well as the important aspect of "leadership are the domain of those in the middle of the hierarchy" (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 2).

However, Gunter and Fitzgerald (2007) argue that by emphasising planning, meeting targets, monitoring performance of teachers and students and the raft of other administrative duties middle leaders face, takes them away from pedagogical practice. The challenge therefore, is to re-think where students are placed within the process of their learning. Perhaps by doing this, middle leaders will be able to re-focus on leading their teams in improving teaching practices and students will become leaders of their own learning while teaching will become more student-centred and less teacher-dominated (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007). Would this mean, however that the various administrative tasks are 'dumped' onto others within the team, under the guise of distributed leadership?

Role ambiguity

As previously mentioned, middle leaders have an important position in making improvement happen yet they get frustrated because their reponsibilites and authority are not clearly defined which leads to role ambiguity. Job descriptions might list tasks and responsibilities of the middle leader however, people behave differently from their job descriptions by responding to both the expectations of the set role and their own,

individual interpretations of the position (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Added to this, the fluidity of the role, with tasks changing according to context, the changing face of teaching and leading and perhaps the differing expectations of the SLT and middle leaders of the role, the middle leader can find themselves dealing with role strain, conflict or ambiguity (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Witziers, Sleegers, Imants, 1999). Role strain is evident when individual expectations are not shared with others or are contradicted and this can lead to role overload, increasing to "the point where strain and sometimes stress is evident" (Bush & Middlewood, 2005, p. 71). Furthermore, conflict can also occur when contradictory expecations are held for middle leaders or role ambiguity occurs when a middle leader is "uncertain about the precise nature of the role at any given time" (Bush & Middlewood, 2005, p. 71) which is common for new middle leaders. Being a middle leader does not mean being "all things to all people" according to Blandford (1999, p. 11). In fact, this idea is linked to Bush and Middlewood's (2005) assertion that middle leaders should be able to shape their roles according to their own sense of what is important, individually interpret their role and use creativity and innovative ideas in order to form their position. However, Blandford (1997) does suggest that middle leaders need to know what their role entails according to:

- Tasks
- Responsibilities
- Relationships
- Working conditions; and
- External influences.

Furthermore, having a clear understanding of the role detailed in the job description is essential and should be negotiated with the SLT. It is vital asserts Blandford (1997) that "clarity is essential if you are to avoid ambiguities which lead to confusion" (p. 12).

There is no question that within New Zealand secondary schools, the intensification of work in recent times as a result of educational reforms and changes to curricula and

national examinations has been forced down to middle leaders (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 12). Changes in the traditional role of middle leader have occurred and their current role within secondary school organisations is not necessarily widely understood. This role ambiguity is further enhanced by studies that frequently report the feeling of middle leaders that they are the 'meat in the sandwich', neither part of the SLT nor are they just teachers (Fitzgerald, 2000). Added to this, the Professional Standards generated by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 1999) neglect to mention the notion of team development and leadership of teams within the Unit Holder's role, yet they are expected to lead often large department teams. Furthermore, asserts Fitzgerald (2000) within these professional standards "there does not appear to be a sense that team work, collaboration or team leadership and development are integral aspects" (p. 72) of the job which are widely accepted as integral to the middle leader's role and in many respects, their survival. Blandford (1997) suggests that the middle leader's role is to teach, lead teams and be a team member, as do several other writers who frequently refer to middle leaders as leading teams, working within teams and building teams (Adey, 2000; Bennett et al., 2007; Fitzgerald, 2000).

CHALLENGES OF LEADING TEAMS FROM THE MIDDLE

Lack of Time

The enemy of the middle leader: time is revealed in the literature as a key tension and challenge to their role. In many studies (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Collier et al.; 2002; Cranston, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2000) lack of time is indicated as a negative aspect to the middle leader's role. The constant workload pressure, meeting the demands, deadlines and pressures of the job all erode the amount of time middle leaders have for other aspects of the job, such as leading teams and enhancing teaching and learning. For Australian middle leaders in Cranston's (2006) study, there were just too many demands on their time to do any more. There is "too little time available to deal with the multiplicity of demands of the position" suggest Collier et al., 2002, p.24) reflecting perhaps a need to redesign the middle leader's role so less time

is spent on administrative matters and more time spent on the professional leadership aspects of their role, which by their own admission "they are currently compromising or even neglecting" (Collier et al., 2002, p. 24). The constraints of time help to reduce the direct influence a middle leader has over improved teaching and learning in their department, yet time can also be used as an excuse to avoid monitoring the quality of their colleague's teaching (Brown & Rutherford, 1998).

The challenge for middle leader's, in a recent study by Fitzgerald (2009) is the need to balance people and paperwork. Participants indicated that management and leadership "were located in a dichotomous relationship. Management is seen as a range of functional activities whereas leadership is viewed as having a more strategic purpose; team work and working with others" (p. 61). Evidence suggests that space needs to be created for middle leaders to have time and opportunity to work with their teams as delegation from senior leaders has intensified the management and leadership aspects of the middle leader's role (Fitzgerald, 2009). In Cranston's (2006) study the aspects of the real role and the ideal role of the middle leader are noteworthy. He suggests two main differences were; that middle leaders would like to spend more time on strategic and educational leadership and less time on staffing matters and operational matters. His data further reinforces the fact that there is a "lack of role alignment between what these school leaders actually do in a week and what they would like to do" (p. 6). Time is the mitigating factor. The literature consistently points to the conclusion that middle leaders are integral to the quality of teaching and learning that occurs within secondary schools (Fitzgerald et al., 2006). Leading takes time. Learning takes time. Building relationships and team work takes time. Time is a barrier and challenge for school organisations if the middle leadership role is to become more leadership oriented, while at the same time ensuring that the necessary administrative tasks are completed (Cranston, 2006).

Whole school expectations versus department loyalty

Middle leaders occupy the middle position in the school hierarchy. Therefore, they have formal responsibilities and accountabilities for the organisation and their own departments, which inevitably create tension as they are often faced with competing demands (Harris, 2000). In addition, middle leaders have a significant teaching load and in large schools are responsible for 10 or more staff and the teaching and learning of hundreds of students (Dinham, 2007). Middle leaders are agents who work on behalf of the whole organisation in the interests of students, parents and their departments and there is an increasing challenge placed on them to perform at even higher levels (Harris, 2000).

Typically, the middle leader participates in school planning and policy and also contributes to decision making at the higher level if they are to be effective (Chatwin, 2004; Harris, 2000; Harvey, 2000). Contrasting with this view is Hall and Wallace's (1996) notion that middle leaders could contribute as equals to deliberations but their influence within the school wide policy making process was limited to representing the views of staff to senior leaders. As discussed earlier they are the link between the upper management teams and their own department teams which can pose a challenge for middle leaders. Harris (2000) suggests that this "bridging or brokering" (p. 82) function remains a key responsibility for middle leaders. She suggests that one aspect to middle leadership is the "liaison or representative role….representing the views of department colleagues to senior staff and to other middle managers within the school" (p. 83). According to Harvey (2000), middle leaders were recognised as being valuable people when discussing the strategic focus of the school as there is an expectation they would challenge the conventional thinking. There is a need for middle leaders to use "strategic influencing skills" (Chatwin, 2004, p.17)) in order to try and influence strategic direction which indicates even more ability is required by the middle leader than interpersonal skills. Indeed, according to Chatwin (2004) middle leaders need a range of skills such as; the ability to understand the organisation-wide implications of actions taken now for the future success of the school; and, the ability to judge when the climate

is right for arguing a particular course of action, the ability to read political currents within the school and to build and maintain alliances with other middle leaders and senior staff. However, Busher and Harris (1999). suggest that their degree of involvement in strategic matters varies according to the nature and leadership of their organisation. In order for middle leaders to play a role in the wider school setting, they must first feel comfortable with their department colleagues and be seen as protectors of the subject area suggests Bennett et al. (2007).

Middle leaders aim to lead and participate in their department teams whilst motivating others and being a role model to his or her team members. They should inspire and motivate members to achieve high standards and work towards fulfilling the school's aims and objectives (Blandford, 1997). A study by Bennett et al. (2007) highlighted the growing tension between "expectations that the middle leader role had a whole school focus and their loyalty to their department" (p. 453). A collegial, team based structure was preferred by middle leaders but there seems to be a threat to this collegiality because middle leaders are expected to monitor their colleagues competence and quality of their teaching. Something they were reluctant to do, according to Bennett et al. (2007). This tension of monitoring colleagues must be acknowledged and resolved by middle leaders. Consequently, informal and other strategies such as monitoring the quality of classroom practice as a whole departmental responsibility so that accountability becomes part of a collaborative learning strategy which could be aimed at improving practice for the teams as a whole (Bennett et al. 2007).

Building Effective Teams

A team's ability to work together does not happen instantaneously, as effort, patience, humility and facilitation is needed to make teams work effectively (Bell, 1992; Preskill & Torres, 1999). Certainly, within New Zealand's educational institutions team work is widespread and is considered an appropriate and necessary part of school structures yet there is little published research on the "incidence or effectiveness of teams"

(Cardno, 1999, p.3). Bush and Middlewood (2005) suggest that there is "considerable support for the notion of team work in education" (p. 108) but this is by no means sufficient to guarantee that teams are effective as developing teams can be problematic. They do not happen by chance (Bell, 1992; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009). According to the literature accomplishing work goals and objectives through teams is not always an easy task and in many organisations the implementation of teams has not worked because decision makers have not fully considered the challenges of team work (Bell, 1992; Preskill & Torres, 1999). Some of these challenges include: lack of clarity and expectation among team members; the presence of defensive behaviours by team members; disagreements over goals; and, intra-group competition to name a few (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009). There are also personal challenges for the middle leader of the team who is seen as the formal leader of the group. The dual location of the formal leader as team member and leader creates a perceived risk for the middle leader who may be reluctant to share their decision-making with others because they fear costly mistakes may be made, for which they will bear the ramifications (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009).

When working in and making decisions within the team or department, "time is one of two strong constraints" facing middle leaders (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 367). When making decisions in a team, time is often a critical component because time has a price (Hoy & Miskel, 2008); it is regarded as a cost in terms of the loss of consideration given to other activities. Furthermore, Hoy and Miskel (2008) argue that time "limits the extent of participation in decision-making, but if time permits, the leader can develop the knowledge and skills" (p. 357) that enable teachers within the department to participate effectively in decisions. The notion of time allows for the questions to be asked such as; when should time be devoted to working as a team in making decisions? How much time should be given? Time is a factor for middle leaders of teams in order to achieve the ideals of collaboration and collaborative decision-making because they need time and dedication to devote to developing a collaborative environment.

Building trust and openness by using productive dialogue (which will be developed later) or discussion is another important link which can be made within the literature to building an effective team. In order to achieve a high degree of collaboration in the decision-making process there needs to be a sense of trust. Developing trust within the team is a challenge for middle leaders but stems from using and engaging in dialogue and discussion (Cardno, 2002; Senge, 1990). Both dialogue and discussion are important skills for middle leaders and teachers to acquire which in turn allow a team to be capable of continual productive learning (Senge, 1990). By using dialogue in trying to cope with problems or decisions, different issues are explored from many varied points of view. Having dialogue within a team can be a divergence however, as often the team may not seek agreement but a "richer grasp of complex issues" (Senge, 1990, p. 247). Conflict can occur in dialogue which most people see as negative, however it can also be positive as it can produce new ways of thinking and is reflective for participants suggests Fullan (2007). Indeed, lack of conflict affects a team because it prevents the team or group from questioning decisions and limits the exploration of alternative solutions, hence discouraging ideas and evaluation and promoting a 'Groupthink' mentality (Fullan, 2007). It is through constructive dialogue that individuals gain insight which they could not simply achieve individually (Senge, 1990). Therefore, it is necessary according to Senge (1990) for discussion and dialogue to complement each other if a team wants to have meaningful conversations and work collaboratively. Furthermore, Senge (1990) and Fullan (2007) suggest a unique relationship develops among team members who embark on dialogue regularly as they develop trust with each other and also a deeper understanding of the distinctive nature of each person's point of view.

Several writers (Garmston & Wellman, 1998; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Senge, 1990) assert that by learning how to transform their way of talking into more meaningful conversations relationships are improved as are personal and collective practices. This in turn allows the middle leader to gain a sense of trust and openness about issues and therefore should improve collegiality and team work. Garmston and Wellman (1998)

suggest dialogue "leads to collective meaning making and shared understanding with a sense of connection and belonging" (p. 30) while discussion often leads to sound decisions. Furthermore, skilful discussions allow thorough critical thinking, the weighing of options, mutual respect, trust and "decision making that serves the group's vision, values and goals" (Garmston & Wellman, 1998, p. 30). The research undertaken by Cardno (1990) suggests that in a collaborative school there are certain characteristics such as: team work is evident at all levels, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, methods for participation are evident, collaboration is managed and professional development is emphasised especially in the development of improving communication between staff and teams. Therefore, it is evident in the literature that talking with others underpins both team work and collaborative decision-making.

The third link is the strong commitment to the value of participation, the idea that a "heightened sense of ownership and commitment can be achieved if a collaborative approach" (Cardno, 1998c, p. 110) is adopted it will then benefit the organisation. The two previous connections, time and engaging in dialogue and discussion, also have links to the idea of ownership and empowerment of teachers who work in the team. Both Hoy and Miskell (2008) and Gronn (2003) assert that the research on teacher participation in decision-making has mostly supported the benefits of empowering teachers during the process. Cranston and Ehrich (2009) also support that team work enables members "a voice" (p. 18) and working in a team can be more "effective than working on one's own, engendering greater commitment and support" (p. 18). If time is not an issue and the goal is to develop the skills such as dialogue and discussion which in turn allow teachers to contribute more effectively to decision-making, then collaboration is more likely and also necessary (Hoy & Miskell, 2008).

However, the empowerment and participation of teachers is not always advantageous because the effectiveness of teachers participating depends on the problem and situation (Hoy & Miskell, 2008). Brundrett (1998) critiques the view of teacher

empowerment by suggesting that claims "made for collegiality and collaboration are, in fact, attributable only to certain versions of them" (p. 311). He argues that collaboration may be espoused but in fact it is not really a collegial or collaborative environment but rather a clever use of manipulation where individuals and groups seek "to realise their values and goals at the expense of others" (p. 311) while assuming the guise of collaboration which therefore takes us back to the need for openness, trust and dialogue.

The Challenges of People Management

Middle leaders are working with and through others which means it can be a complex and messy role especially when people are involved (Fitzgerald et al., 2006). Within an educational setting middle leaders are working with people, whether they be students, parents or colleagues and therefore the most difficult problems tend to be generated by people. Some of the relationships we have are effective and satisfying and when the occasional problem occurs they are dealt with easily and efficiently according to Dick and Dalmau (1999). However, others have a different experience, where from time to time, problems arise without being dealt with effectively, they recur and become "crucial long-term problems that mitigate effectiveness" (Cardno, 2007, p.33).

According to Cardno (2007) dilemmas are "complex, tension-fraught problems that arise when a leader is challenged to achieve more than one objective" (p.33). Most leaders find dilemmas exist when there is a tension between a concern for the needs of an organisation and a concern for the relationship between the leader and the individual (Cardno, 2007). Dilemmas can often put middle leaders between a rock and a hard place and many people "believe dilemmas are irresolvable, consequently they avoid having to deal with them" (Cardno, 2007, p.33). Furthermore, Fullan (2007) supports Cardno's research by suggesting avoidance is one of the most dangerous ways of dealing with conflict because it is a sure way of diminishing trust because there is a false façade of congeniality and no learning can take place. Losing the trust of

colleagues and the team is certainly something middle leaders should be trying to avoid, especially as trust is gained over time and is the glue of day-to-day life in a team (West & Derrington, 2009).

One of the main challenges that middle leaders face within the concept of dilemma management is that leadership dilemmas must be solved. If people continue to avoid conflict they can wreak havoc within an organisation (Piggot-Irvine, 2003).   As discussed earlier, tensions between organisational goals and individual goals can manifest "as tensions between a leader's concerns to do what is best for the organisation whilst at the same time maintaining a positive working relationship with a colleague" (Cardno, 2007, p.34). Middle leaders must first recognise the problem as a dilemma and confront it even though people are concerned that they might upset others. They must make a "conscious choice to deal with both the organisational and relational horns of the dilemma simultaneously" (Cardno, 2007, p.34) because otherwise the dilemma will continue to persist, resurface and the attempts that we try to resolve them, will exacerbate the tension. This is common according to Cardno (2007) because if middle leaders attend to only one aspect of the problem they are sacrificing another and not surprisingly the dilemma is avoided.

Inadequate Professional Development

Lack of professional development given for middle leaders is a challenge several writers (Adey, 2000; Blandford, 1997; Brown et al., 2000) highlight as an issue. The process whereby teachers become middle leaders is unclear according to Blandford (1997), yet many teachers find themselves in this vital role in secondary schools.   Lack of recognised training for middle leaders is emphasised in Adey's (2000) research who indicates there is little surprise that middle leaders "are likely to receive no training to prepare them for promotion" (p. 422). This can add further tension to their role as they learn to grapple with the complexities of their job such as: resolving conflict between staff; motivating staff; conducting appraisal effectively; managing teams; managing their

own time; and, taking action to address problems with teaching quality and competence (Adey, 2000). Cranston's (2006) Australian study highlights the professional development of middle leaders especially in promoting team work was a major issue. For many middle leaders, learning on the job and watching others has been the closest to any form of 'training' given to middle leaders (Adey, 2000). Findings from Adey's (2000) research highlight the growing acceptance of responsibility and accountability middle leaders have for the enhancement of teaching and learning within their teams but they feel ill-equipped to deal with them effectively. The dangers are self-evident when appointing people to middle leadership positions and then expecting them to get on with it and learn quickly (Adey, 2000).

The National College of School Leadership Programme (NCSLP) in England supported the first major programme aimed at middle leadership whereby their Leadership from the Middle (LftM) programme developed middle leaders who are at "the frontline of leading learning" (Naylor, Gkloia & Brundrett, 2006, p. 11). Data revealed that middle leaders perceived their confidence as leaders had grown as a result of participating in the programme. Middle leaders were more aware of their team and what they do and how to delegate and coach team members better. Middle leaders also saw a change in their confidence, clarity of their role and had more motivation to work as a team and with others. Consequently, the data revealed that "middle leaders have a growing awareness and respect for the team they work in" (Naylor et al., 2006, p. 13). New Zealand schools could learn from this programme as middle leaders make a vital contribution to school improvement but at present there is a lack of professional development for leaders in this important role. Fitzgerald et al. (2006) assert, "the professional development of teachers as leaders is critical to continued innovation and change" (p. 32).

DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES

Commonality of purpose

Team leadership involves working with and through others both individually and in groups in order to achieve organisational goals (Owens, 2004) therefore the concept of team work and collaboration is bound to "notions of consultation, involvement and participation; shared goals and shared vision, openness, trust and democratic ideals" (Cardno, 1990, p. 1).

The definition of a group which Preskill and Torres (1999) suggest is a "loose association of people who may or may not share common goals and purposes (p. 23) while a team is a "special kind of group that actively works collaboratively to answer the organisation's questions" (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p. 23). Just as the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Board of Trustees (BOT) are considered teams in schools, the Faculty and/or Department is also a team because they have leadership, common goals and a willingness to work together to make choices and decisions (Witziers et al., 1999). Adair's (1986) earlier research also indicated that although a team might be temporary and its membership could change, it was distinguished from a group because it had a common task, and members would make a contribution. Senge (1990) asserts "when a team becomes more aligned a commonality of direction emerges and individual's energies harmonise" (p. 234), therefore the purpose of a team could be suggested that the group works together, in partnership to achieve certain goals or make decisions collaboratively.

Although little research has been done on middle leadership team work (Dinham, 2006), Cranston and Ehrich (2005 and 2009) assert that what has been researched on SLTs is relevant to other teams within the school. Developing a shared culture, goals, beliefs and effective team work processes among members are important issues for middle leaders in building effective teams. According to the Leadership Best Evidence

Synthesis Iteration by New Zealand researchers Robinson et al. (2009) "goals do not motivate unless they are seen to be important" (p. 106). Generating connections between team members by allowing time for dialogue about teaching and learning practices strengthens relationships within a team suggests Fullan (2007). Furthermore, he asserts that when members engage in knowledge creation through dialogue and meaningful tasks, they can form bonds with other members of the team, which in turn fosters commitment to shared values and goals of the team and organisation.

Bell (1992) recommends that teams work together on the basis of a shared understanding, purpose, procedures and commitment, co-operation and resolving disagreements by open discussion. He also suggests that four elements need to be balanced by the middle leader of the team which include: individuals, the task, the team and the leadership role. Team members might need encouragement, reassurance and appreciating in order to establish and retain their membership in a participatory sense promotes Bell (1992). This is especially true in the current context whereby subject departments are in a state of change with the implementation of the revised NZC and new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) matrix, so the tasks of the department team may have changed and become intensified more recently due to changes in the curriculum. There is a need for middle leaders to be aware of the current changes and how they can impact on members of a team. Therefore middle leaders must develop, cultivate and value team members to retain active membership of a team (Bell, 1992).

Team Leadership

The most powerful leadership skills are building relationships and trust with others (Robinson et al, 2009; Piggot-Irvine, 2003). Leading teams and trying to develop teams to become effective is a collective skill and one that requires strong leadership in order to structure the development of the team (Cardno, 2002). Leaders need to facilitate teams and need to decide "how the participation of others will be managed so that the

potential of collaborative decision-making is fully utilised" (Cardno, 1998c, p. 110). As roles have intensified for principals of educational institutions the idea of distributed leadership has become prevalent, mainly as a response to work pressures and intensification (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Gronn, 2003; Youngs, 2008). Teams have become more prominent and play an important role at the middle level of the organisation (Witziers et al., 1999). They have become more popular as a form of distributed leadership according to Gronn (2003) but "leading teams effectively has not been part of the training" (p. 16), hence a need for professional development in this area, especially for middle leaders who are responsible for leading often large departmental teams. Cranston and Ehrich (2009) support this notion by asserting that effective teams do not simply happen, they require training, development and reflection if they are to be successful. The lack of team training and the development of skills needed to allow for team learning taking place is an issue associated with this theme. If educational institutions do not have the "internal resources to provide professional development of teams they will be reliant on external facilitators" (Cardno, 2002, p. 221) which is costly, thereby improving the odds of leaders finding a way out of making team development a priority.

There is a high incidence of teams in New Zealand secondary schools. Middle leaders have the responsibility of leading their Faculty/Department team. They are members of the team, and also a member of other teams within the school. The essential element of working together according to Cardno (1998c) and the New Zealand's recent Leadership Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration by Robinson, Hohepa and Llyod (2009), is trust. Trusting the task, trusting the individuals and trusting the team. Fullan (2007) asserts trust is important and that it does not develop overnight. It takes a long time to "build although can be destroyed very quickly" (Fullan, 2007, p. 157). Trust can be strengthened as behaviours such as "acceptance of vulnerabilities, honesty and open-mindedness are consistently modelled" (Fullan, 2007, p. 157) and when these supportive interactions occur frequently, the greater the chance for trust to build within the team. When leaders make a deliberate effort to build a team and use the skills of

dialogue to allow for the team to learn to be open, have high trust and low defensive interactions (Cardno, 1998b; Piggot-Irvine, 2003) the possibility of having positive and effective teams may be reached.

Connections can be made between the challenge of building effective teams and working collaboratively. The crucial factor of time associated with team work and collaboration, building trust and openness in teams through productive conversations and the important link of providing inclusiveness and ownership of decisions made, which in turn empower people within the team and institution.

Dealing with Dilemmas and Using Productive Dialogue

When a dilemma arises either because it has become heightened or surfaced, leaders tend to try these three approaches according to Cardno (1998a); avoidance, soft-sell or hard-sell. These approaches link back to our defensive reasoning strategy because we are either avoiding or controlling the situation (Argyris, 1977). Avoiding the problem is the most common strategy according to Cardno (1998a) whereby either the issue is suppressed totally or not dealt with at all in the hope that it will disappear, or only one of the relational horns is dealt with. Consequently, the dilemma will persist even though it may disappear for a while. The second response is the soft-sell approach. This approach allows us to protect ourselves and others and is concerned with "pussyfooting in order to protect others and one-self and to be indirect in communicating problems" (Cardno, 1998a, p.2). A limitation to this approach is the fact that organisational goals will remain unachievable but the relationships are maintained, for the time being, and individuals protected. The final approach is the hard-sell approach. This common approach often occurs when the soft-sell approach fails. An authoritarian stance (Cardno, 1998) is adopted, there is seldom a two-way communication of facts and blame is laid elsewhere such as policy and management. Subsequently, relationships will be eroded, organisational goals are met but only for a short time and there will be an unlikely commitment to change (Cardno, 1998a).

For middle leaders, learning can occur "when a leader learns how to approach the management of a dilemma in a productive way" (Cardno, 2007, p.34). Argyris (1977) and Sun and Scott (2003) agree that an organisation learns if it is able to detect and correct errors. For organisations to learn it is important for individuals and teams to identify the error and correct it by using a range of skills so that learning can take place. The research indicates that through productive conversations, using the mental tool of The Ladder of Inference "originally developed by Chris Argyris (1990)" (Robinson, 2006, p.45) and being reflective in and on action are ways in which dilemmas can be managed effectively (Cardno,1998; Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Robinson, 2006; Robinson et al., 2009; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton & Kleiner, 2000). Productive conversations are learning conversations as Robinson (2006) refers or Open to Learning Conversations (Robinson et al., 2009) which allow "the person to be treated not as someone to be won over but as a contributor to the process of describing, explaining and evaluating" (Robinson, 2006, p.42). These conversations recognise the importance of treating differing accounts of a problem in order for people to learn better ways in which to think about and resolve a problem. Cardno (2001) puts forth the Triple I approach which help people internalise the skills of productive conversations. This approach allows middle leaders to consider information, illustration and inquiry to be essential components of productive conversations along with dealing with emotions.

Dealing with people problems such as dilemmas of course, takes time, professional development and practice. Barriers that middle leaders already face in their complex role.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to middle leaders in secondary school education. It highlights the complex nature of the role especially in leading teams as middle leadership centres around working with others in order to achieve department and organisational goals, whilst bearing in mind the importance of improving the

learning outcomes for students. There are numerous challenges for middle leaders as they engage in their professional role and there is a need for Professional Development and support for middle leaders as they grapple with the complex challenges they face in the current New Zealand climate. There is also a need for further research into the functioning of teams as departments along with how middle leaders in particular cope with the dilemmas and challenges they face. This literature review contributes to the methodology adopted which is outlined in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines and justifies the choice of research methodology used in the study of middle level leaders of teams in four large New Zealand secondary schools. Firstly, it presents an overview of the qualitative methodological approach to the research. It then provides a rationale, as to why this approach has been taken, outlines how the schools and study sample were selected and considers the two data collection methods used; open-ended questionnaire and focus groups. The analysis of data, reliability and validity are discussed with reference to triangulation and finally ethical issues associated with the research are addressed.

METHODOLOGY

Overview

Expectations. Challenges. Tensions. The topic of this research stems from the role and challenges arising at the interface of relationships in teams. It has dealt with personal relationships and views, people's perceptions, feelings, experiences and values that are all thoroughly entwined with human nature. Unlike a positivist position which "advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality" (Bryman, 2008, p.13) the epistemological position I have taken is interpretivism.

Interpretivism implies that the subject matter of the Social Sciences, for example "people and their institutions is fundamentally different from that of the natural science" (Bryman, 2008, p.15) which consequently means a requirement for a different type of philosophical understanding of knowledge. Coleman and Briggs (2002) echo his idea

and assert that "all educational research needs to be grounded in people's experiences" (p. 18). For interpretivists, reality is a construct whereby people understand their reality in different ways (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). Bryman (2008) suggests interpretivism "reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order" (p. 15). Human nature is complex, elusive and combines intangible qualities of society which contrasts remarkably with the ordered and natural world (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) therefore, the positivist approach would be inappropriate in my study to consider the expectations and challenges of middle leaders in teams.

The job of a social science researcher is to gain access to people's "common sense thinking" according to Bryman (2008, p.16) who claims the researcher should be interpreting people's actions and social world from their point of view. Several interpretations will be taking place in this way; the researcher will be providing an interpretation of other's perceptions while the researcher's interpretations will then be further interpreted in terms of ideas, theories and the literature associated with the discipline, in this case, Educational Leadership and Management. Furthermore, Coleman and Briggs (2002) point out interpretive researchers understand that they are part of, rather than separate from, the topics they investigate. This subjective, interpretive position therefore fits comfortably in the realm of using a qualitative methodological approach.

A qualitative approach allows the researcher room to be innovative, flexible and use a literary style of writing to discuss and analyse findings (Coleman & Briggs, 2002; Cresswell, 2002). It is also an approach that Cresswell (2002) suggested will be useful if little research has been done on a concept because qualitative research is more exploratory than other methodologies. There is a gap in the literature base involving middle leaders and teams especially in the context of New Zealand secondary schools which allows for this exploration to occur. Although historically, qualitative research had been relegated to subordinate status since the 1960s it has now become a "field of

inquiry in its own right. It cross-cuts disciplines, fields and subject matters" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 11). A definition offered by Bryman (2008) is that qualitative research is a "strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (p. 366). Indeed, Coleman and Briggs (2002) add that "textual analysis predominates" (p. 21) as the essence of the qualitative researcher's work is both "rich and deep description" (p. 20). This methodological approach suits my topic and research questions, because they are focussed on description, perspectives and different people's points of view.

Rationale

As a qualitative researcher the emphasis is on the "value-laden nature of inquiry" whereby the researcher seeks answers to questions that "stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). In order to understand the roles and challenges that middle leaders of teams find themselves in within the current New Zealand secondary school context I need closer involvement with them and the qualitative methodology allows this to happen. It has also allowed for a better understanding of behaviour, beliefs and values (Bryman, 2008) of middle leaders in their organisations unlike the quantitative approach which wants the findings to be generalisable to the relevant population (Bryman, 2008).

The research study comes from the interface of relationships and needed to explore the challenges and problems at this interface. A deeper, more interpretive approach was required in order for me to make sense of the topic and of the participant's perception of their reality, their expectations of their middle leadership role, their relationships and challenges with others while they attend to the daily business of teaching and learning within their Faculties. As Davidson and Tolich (2003) assert in qualitative research "the results presented accurately reflect the opinions or actions of the people in the study" (p. 34).

Sample selection

The four schools who participated in the research study had a student-body population of over 1600 students. Although it was not my aim to generate any particular type of school, it has transpired that three of the large schools are single-sexed and one is a co-educational school. They share some commonalities such as: being state schools; having a high decile rating; a 2-tier middle leadership structure; and, similar ethnicity as shown by the table below which outlines the school profiles. Three schools were Auckland based and School C was based outside of Auckland.

Table 3.1: Profiles of Participating Schools

	School A	*School B*	*School C*	*School D*
Institute Type	Secondary (Year 9-13)	Secondary (Year 9-13)	Secondary (Year 9-13)	Secondary (Year 9-13)
Authority	State	State	State	State
Gender	Co-Ed	Single-Sex	Single-Sex	Single-Sex
Roll Size	1597	2432	1964	2068
Decile Rating	10	10	8	9
Middle level structure	HOF/HOD	HOF/HOD	HOF/TCR	HOF/HOD
Ethnicity	*European 76.6%* *Maori 16.4%* *Pacific Is. 4.6%* *Asian 10.3%* *Other 4.9%* *International Students 1.6%*	*European 49.9%* *Maori 3.3%* *Pacific Is. 3.3%* *Asian 38.0%* *Other 2.1%* *International Students 1.8%*	*European 61.8%* *Maori 16.4%* *Pacific Is. 4.6%* *Asian 10.3%* *Other 4.9%* *International Students 1.6%*	*European 52.7%* *Maori 16.4%* *Pacific Is. 4.6%* *Asian 10.3%* *Other 4.9%* *International Students 1.6%*

Source: (Ethnicity and School roll size based on Ministry of Education figures July, 2009).

* HOF (Heads of Faculty); HOD, (Head of Department); TCR (Teacher with Curriculum Responsibility).

Private schools were not approached which was purposefully done as I did not want to compare and/or contrast the state and private sector in this study. My intention was to see how middle leaders of teams in large public secondary schools are grappling with the current expectations and challenges they face. I work in a large single-sex state school and felt that conducting research in similar settings would be advantageous for

my own professional development and my own organisation. Schools with larger student populations tend to also have larger teams to lead, and quite possibly there would be more complex challenges to face. The schools targeted had a structure that relied on middle leaders to lead teaching and learning, as they are in effect the distributors of the curriculum. All four schools as shown in Table 3.1, had a two-tier middle leadership structure within the faculties; namely the Head of Faculty and Head of Department of in School C's case Teacher with Curriculum Responsibility (TCR).

Open-ended Questionnaire Sample

Sample participants were generated from each school in the following manner. After initially gaining consent from the four participating schools, a contact person became my main source of communication. They gave out the participation information sheet for the open-ended questionnaire and generated volunteers for the research. Up to three senior leaders and up to three HOFs in each participating school willingly volunteered to complete the open-ended questionnaire. Hard copies and an email copy, for ease of administration, of the open-ended questionnaire were delivered to the contact person, who then administered the completion and return of the data instrument in a sealed envelope, to me, by a specified date. This became phase one of my research which helped to fine-tune the focus group interview questions. In all, 19/24.open-ended questionnaires were completed which resulted in a 79% response rate. As a researcher I was pleased with this outcome as 12/12 Senior Leaders completed the questionnaire allowing for a generous amount of data. Unfortunately only 7/12 HOFs completed the open-ended questionnaire.

Focus Group Sample

Within each school, curriculum middle leaders were approached by the contact person to see if they were willing to voluntarily participate in the focus group session. An information sheet and a consent form were emailed to each school, they were circulated

and volunteers were generated from within each school. The intention was to gain a minimum of six volunteers for each focus group. A negotiated time was organised and the sessions took place.

The focus groups in the study contained between 5-7 middle leaders and were conducted in the school environment. The gender balance in each focus group differed as shown by the figure below. In total there were 24 participants involved in the four focus group sessions. The gender split was 14 male participants and 11 female participants. The focus groups garnered a range of perspectives and provided me with informative data to work with.

Table 3.2: Focus Group Participant Gender Balance

School A FG	School B FG	School C FG	School D FG
Co- Educational	Single Sexed	Single Sexed	Single Sexed
3 Females	1 Female	1 Female	6 Females
2 Males	5 Males	5 Males	1 Male
Total: 5	Total: 6	Total: 6	Total: 7

The HODs who agreed to participate in the focus groups signed a consent form agreeing to be part of the study. These sessions took approximately one hour to complete and were facilitated by me and were recorded. The sessions were transcribed by the researcher which helped facilitate analysis and allowed me to get closer to the data.

RESEARCH METHODS

Open-ended Questionnaire

When there is a greater interest in the respondent's point of view, qualitative interviews are often employed by researchers (Bryman, 2008). It is one of the "most common and

powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans" asserts Fontana and Frey (2005). Interviews come in a variety of forms including; structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Hinds, 2000) The open-ended questionnaire becomes a form of written interview which relies on open-ended questions and a structured format involving pre-defined questions that are covered in turn (Hinds, 2000). Traditionally the interview has attempted to maintain the neutrality of the interviewer and achieve objectivity by keeping the interviewer as invisible as possible (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This reasoning lends itself nicely to the open-ended questionnaire as the researcher has remained invisible in the process and therefore taken away any bias which may have stemmed from a face-to-face interview. Potential bias include: ethnicity; gender and social background; or the problem of asking questions in a different order or way (Bryman, 2008). However, by using this form it does mean it eliminates the possibility of "reading non-verbal behaviour and of cueing from gender, race, age, class or other personal characteristics" (Fontana &Frey, 2005, p. 363). Therefore, establishing a rapport with the respondent is virtually impossible. Further limitations of the study will be discussed in chapter six

These potential pitfalls did not outweigh the need to reduce time pressures on participants during the course of data collection. I was still able to gain in-depth answers to 10 open-ended questions (see Appendix 1) which allowed the open-ended questionnaire to become an advantageous choice. Bryman (2008) suggests a shorter questionnaire is advisable to reduce the risk of respondent fatigue especially when it is self-administered. Advice from senior leaders to reduce the possibility of time-consuming one-on-one interviews was heeded and I believe produced a better response rate from my sample size of 79%. By conducting an open-ended questionnaire it also allowed for a larger sample to be used (up to 24 participants) than relying on a smaller face-to-face interview sample. Schools are extremely busy organisations, thus a 20-30 minute open-ended questionnaire was easier to administer and caused less disruption for participants. Hard copies and an email version of the open-ended questionnaire were given for ease of administration, and according to Fontana and Frey (2005), the reliance on information gathering through email has increased recently. Within the

participating schools, electronic modes of communication for administration purposes is essential and teachers rely on this form, hence the need to supply an email version of the data gathering instrument. Although as Fontana and Frey (2005) assert, electronic interviews are used primarily for quantitative research in the form of surveys and structured questionnaires, it is "only a matter of time before researchers adapt these techniques to qualitative work" (p. 363).

The questions for the data gathering instrument were all open and allowed the respondent to write down their views, ideas and suggestions about the questions posed (Hinds, 2000). Careful wording of the questions was adhered to, paying particular attention to creating concise and clear questions that related to my research questions whilst trying to glean information from several perspectives. Because the data instrument was done through self-completion the questions, layout, and instructions needed to be easily followed (Bryman, 2008).

A criticism of the interpretive approach Cohen et al. (2007) point out is that a less controlled style of interview, carries greater risks of inaccuracy; therefore by using a structured, carefully selected set of open-ended questions for the open- questionnaire, I have tried to reduce possible threats to its validity. I also pre-tested the questions on three different people within the senior and middle leadership roles in order to ensure that they achieved the desired responses and to see if any were problematical. Minor suggestions were made and I adjusted the questions accordingly. Typically, open-ended questions are less frequently used in a self-administered questionnaire according to Bryman (2008) but for my study I wanted respondents not to be pigeon-holed with their responses by using closed questions. Open-ended questions do have advantages in that respondents can answer in their own terms; unusual responses can be derived; questions do not suggest answers; and, therefore knew knowledge and understanding of issues can be tapped into and they are useful in exploring new areas or issues (Bryman, 2008).

Focus Group Method

Focus groups are a useful form of data gathering when trying to obtain information about how people think, how they perceive an idea or when there is a desire for even more understanding of the human experience (Hinds, 2000). They have some advantages over individual interviews, namely they are inexpensive and produce plentiful data that is both "cumulative and elaborative" (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Individual interviews were initially my preference to conduct but because I wanted a broad range of perspectives and had a desire for more understanding of the expectations and challenges these middle leaders face, focus groups became a better choice of method to employ. These focus groups became phase two of my research after some of the open-ended questionnaires had been administered because I used the open-ended questionnaire to show up any gaps in my range of questioning and made some minor changes to my focus group questions.

Although similar practicalities and practices are used in one-on-one interviews, the focus group relies on quality answers that are directly related to quality questions; therefore questions are "at the heart of the focus group interview" suggests (Krueger, 1994, p.53). Typically there are a number of types of questions used in focus groups asserts Krueger (1994) which include: opening questions which are generally in a round-robin style and answered quickly, the introductory question which introduces the topic of discussion and aims to foster group interaction; the transition questions which help "to move the conversation into the key questions that drive the study" (p. 54); the key questions; and, finally the ending questions which are reflective on the discussion. I used this guide when forming and conducting my own focus group questions.

I chose to develop actual questions (Appendix 2) in a sentence format for the session rather than a topic guide format in accordance with Krueger (1994) who suggests the topic guide format works best with facilitators that are experienced, who can skilfully paraphrase and be more spontaneous. I felt it was more beneficial to be as prepared as

I could be before conducting the focus group sessions. Krueger (1994) suggests one of the advantages of the focus group is that questions can use standardised strategies such as: sentence completion and open-ended questions for instance. These questions were carefully thought about and prepared in advance as I wanted to ensure that the questions were what I intended and eliminated some of the subtle differences in wording that can alter the intent. Initially I identified potential questions and brainstormed a large list. Once the list was completed I culled questions that were of similar variation and concentrated on the wording of questions, with feedback from my supervisors so that the questions captured the intent of my study and were closely linked to the research questions. I carefully avoided dichotomous questions which although seemed appealing to use do not evoke the desired group discussion and can draw out ambiguous answers (Kruger, 1994).

During the focus group sessions there were many things happening at once, hence the need to transcribe the session. The recording device was introduced at the beginning of the discussion and used as a tool to capture comments (Krueger & Casey, 2000). I checked the equipment before the sessions began to ensure comments would be captured and brief written notes were made for the purpose of staying on top of the conversation (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006). I also wanted to note down any non-verbal communication because body language is important if respondents become uneasy or anxious, hence the need to be ethically sensitive to participants and cut short any line of questioning that became a source of concern (Bryman, 2008).

People are generally more aware of the interview processes and know the roles and general behaviour on how to conduct an interview (Fontana & Frey, 2005) so it was important to outline three simple rules of the focus group which included:

> ➢ One person speak at a time
> ➢ Say their name before speaking to help with transcription; and
> ➢ Be as honest and open as possible.

A short introduction was given at the start of the session, outlining the research, highlighting the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet which was approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC), setting up the simple rules and moving into the opening question. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest using the 'probe' technique early in the discussion which I tried to do, in order to convey the importance of being precise with responses. However, I was aware that using this technique to excess can become "time-consuming, annoying and unnecessary" (p.110). In order to close the session I included a final question that encouraged participants to finalise what they felt were the most important aspects of the discussion. The focus group process is based on the principles of "self-disclosure, grounded in a comfortable environment, a particular type of questioning and the establishment of focus group rules" (Hinds, 2000, p. 49). I took these principles and used them within my sessions, whilst trying to establish a good rapport with the groups and foster group interaction.

DATA ANALYSIS

Open-ended Questionnaire

The need to gather data that can be interpreted concisely for analysis is imperative. According to Lofland et al. (2006) analysing data is a "highly interactive process between the researcher and the data" (p. 196) and there is a need for the researcher to be methodical and persistent as it is a "labour intensive and time-consuming task" (p. 196). Various strategies were used to make analysis more manageable which are outlined below.

As soon as the open-ended questionnaires were completed I began my initial analysis of the data. Several writers including Bryman (2000) and Lofland et al. (2006) suggest getting started early in the process because it will take time and it also allows the researcher to begin thinking analytically throughout the study rather than leaving it all to the end when time is of the essence. I numerically coded each response such as: SLTA1, MLTA1 and cut up each answer, pasting them under each question in a scrap

book, then used coloured highlighters to show broad themes. The two strategies outlined under focus group data analysis namely, thematic coding and memoing were used for the open-ended questionnaire. Diagrams were also used to show connections with the senior leadership responses and HOF responses and were an effective tool for comparison.

Flexibility during analysis (Lofland et al., 2006) becomes key, and matrices and flowcharts were also used. Concept diagrams like matrices and relationship diagrams such as Venn diagrams and Radial diagrams helped to show connections and generated questions about the similarities, differences and relationships between the senior leadership and HOF responses. The constant comparison of data during the analysis process was important in order to make sense of the emerging themes. Using a matrix as "a framework for the thematic analysis of qualitative data provides one way of thinking about how to manage themes and data" (Bryman, 2008, p. 555). The themes of: middle leadership is critical, leadership versus management and the complexity of the role were linked to the first research question about middle leadership expectations. Themes of workload and intensification linked to change, team work, and people management were seen as challenges middle leaders faced. These were all intertwined with the issue of time constraints. Thirdly, research question number three on how middle leaders deal with these challenges included themes such as: professional development, support networks, communication, team work, and distributing leadership. I identified these themes in the data by looking at and highlighting repetition of words and/or motifs, similarities and differences between the senior leaders and HOF responses and reflecting on what was missing from the data. These suggestions from Ryan and Bernard (2003) provided a good starting point for a more thorough analysis of the data.

Focus Groups

Although an arduous and time-consuming task I chose to transcribe the focus group sessions myself because I felt I would become more familiar with the content and this would prove beneficial in helping to facilitate meaning with the data. The sessions were typed up promptly once they took place because it provided good grounds for "making analysis an ongoing activity" (Bryman, 2008, p. 453) and allowed me to be more aware of emerging themes which in turn, helped to facilitate analysis.

The transcripts of the sessions became valuable hard-copy documents and allowed me to use two key strategies to facilitate analysis. Initially, I employed the long-table, low-technology approach that Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest beginning analysts use. Broad thematic coding into the areas of leadership and management, team work and communication based on themes and sub-themes which stemmed from the literature review, was used to help process the data into various categories and organise it. This is a strategy several writers suggest (Bryman, 2008; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Lofland et al., 2006). Numerical and coloured coding of the focus groups and participants was also used such as: FGA1-FGA5; FGB1-FGB6; FGC1-FGC6; and, FGD1-FGD7 were used for participant responses. This allowed for ease of administration and helped to facilitate analysis by being organised with the transcriptions. Coding of the transcriptions was also started as soon as possible because it allowed for awareness and understanding of the data as it came in and also alleviated the feeling of being inundated with data. Notes and remarks were initially jotted down once transcripts were first read emphasising pertinent points of interest and marginal notes were made. Although very basic at first, for example, key words and theme headings, it generated a range of terms that helped to interpret and began to develop an understanding of the data. Bryman (2008) also suggested reviewing of codes and to watch for connections between codes in order to consider how they related to the existing literature.

A reflective journal was used throughout the data gathering process which enabled me to record thoughts in one place and also helped to clarify ideas and findings throughout the process. This was important in formulating initial decisions about the focus group sessions and any important and relevant ideas that were beginning to emerge from both data gathering methods. In the journal I used the strategy of memoing (Bryman, 2008; Lofland et al., 2006) which showed the various thematic coding categories and their interconnections, alongside notes on field procedures and any issues I came across. Bryman (2008) asserts that memos are "potentially very helpful to researcher in helping them to crystallise ideas and not to lose track of their thinking" (p. 547). The two strategies, thematic coding and memoing were critical and ongoing steps I used and formed the key process of developing analysis of the data (Lofland et al., 2006). The final strategy I employed to show connections was the use of diagrams which has been previously addressed.

RELIABILITY OF RESULTS

Research, whether qualitative or quantitative in its approach must ensure it has strength which means the researcher must use the most appropriate methodology and methods that are relevant, reliable and valid. Reliability refers to consistency according to Davidson and Tolich (2003) and is where quantitative research lies. In contrast, the qualitative researcher emphasises validity which refers to the "extent to which a question or variable accurately reflects the concept the researcher is looking for" (p. 31). The aim of qualitative research is to provide a precise, valid description and the results "presented accurately reflect the opinions or actions of the people in the study" (p. 34). In essence, as the researcher, I have aimed to clearly communicate how the variety of participants felt about the topic and present these different voices and viewpoints in an accurate manner (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

In order to achieve validity of the data I needed to be concerned with internal validity which is concerned with the "credibility and authenticity of the findings arising from the

manner which the investigation takes place" (Keeves, 1997, p. 280). It was important to reduce possible threats to the validity of the study, hence the use of triangulation which is discussed below.

Triangulation

Triangulation is defined as the "use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 141) and allows the qualitative research to be more credible. Referred to as the multi-method approach it includes four types that are used frequently in educational research: time, space, investigator, or methodological. Methodological triangulation was used in this study and is the most frequently used because it has the most to offer according to Cohen et al. (2007). Using the same method on different occasions, for example, the focus group or using different methods in this case, open-ended questionnaire and focus group, on the same object of study it allows the weaknesses of the differing methods to be strengthened by combining them. Therefore, allowing the researcher to be more confident in the data generated. Different methods of research can therefore build on each other and help to create a better understanding that one single method could not provide. By not relying heavily on one method the picture of the reality for middle leaders of teams has not become distorted (Cohen et al., 2007; Keeves, 1997).

Triangulation however, does have its critics especially in regard to validity (Cohen et al., 2007). There are many areas where bias can creep in to research especially in data gathering suggest Cohen et al. (2007). These are mainly to do with the researcher in a focus group/interview situation and include biases like: attitude, race, age, personality of the researcher, and gender. However, these possible threats of bias have been minimised in the following ways: avoiding poor coding of qualitative data, avoiding making inferences and generalisations beyond the capability of supporting data, avoiding the selective use of data, inaccuracies in transcripts, and ensuring the research questions are answered (Cohen et al., 2007).

In sum, by using methodological triangulation issues of reliability and validity are addressed and the weaknesses strengthened by "using a combined approach to a given problem (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 143) and it also attempts to explain more fully the complexity of the roles and challenges of middle leaders from more than one angle or perspective (Cohen et al., 2007).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to the literature, all research must be conducted in an ethical manner (Bryman, 2008; Wilkinson, 2001). There has been a growing awareness according to Cohen and Manion (1994) of the moral issues in the work of researchers and the need to be aware of the subject matter and methods used in relation to how they affect participants. At the heart of ethics essentially "is how we should treat others" (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 13). Several issues which arise in the relationship between researchers and research participants during the course of an investigation include: informed consent, invasion of privacy, and the minimisation of harm and deceit.

Informed consent was imperative whilst conducting the research investigation. This involved asking permission from institutions informing participants of the key aspects of the research and gaining their written consent. These two forms were approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) during the research approval stage of my study. The advantages of participants being given the opportunity to be "fully informed of the nature of the research and the implications of their participation at the outset" (Bryman, 2008, p. 123) when issued with a consent form has become increasingly preferred in research. The basic principle of informed consent according to Wilkinson (2001) is that if you want to do research with people then it is necessary to ask their permission first as they have the right to be invited to participate and the right of withdrawal without being pressured.

People should be able to understand the relevant information about the project they are accepting to be a part of. It was imperative not to manipulate the participants and therefore necessary to include the likely advantages and disadvantages, how much will be asked of them especially in time, and respecting their decision about participation (Wilkinson, 2001).

Linked to the issue of Informed Consent is the Invasion of Privacy. Bryman (2008) claims that "issues of privacy are linked to issues of anonymity and confidentiality in the research process" (p. 124). Informing participants that their responses will remain anonymous was included in the Participant Information Sheet given to participants from the outset for both data gathering methods. I have also ensured anonymity of the participating schools by using School A, B, C and D. Ensuring anonymity of focus group participants is difficult; in fact impossible because the essence of anonymity defines Cohen and Manion (1994) is "that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity" (p. 366). I have assured participants confidentiality by not using names of participants or other means of identification publically. Instead, I have used alphabetical and numerical codes. This links directly to what Davidson and Tolich (1999) assert that "confidentiality is where the researcher can identify a person's response but promises not to make the connections public" (p. 377).

Leaving a participant vulnerable is what researchers try to avoid and therefore I have tried to be sensitive to the information given by participants especially when it revealed something deeply personal. The need to pay attention to questions and answers was an area I was acutely aware, especially within the focus group sessions. If questions became unsettling, stressful or participants "inadvertently revealed more than they might have intended" (Bryman, 2008, p. 128) I tried to be sensitive and did not coerce them into answering. The culture of research participants was respected and needs met where appropriate.

Lastly, minimisation of harm and avoiding deceit were integral to this study. The potential to 'harm' participants in ways that are not immediately obvious is evident; however I have taken care to maintain the confidentiality of records, transcripts and open-ended questionnaires. They have been secure and have only been accessed by my supervisors and myself. I have also endeavoured not to deceive participants about what the research entailed and tried to outline in an honest and open way what the process included, why it was being done and for whom. This was done via a Participant Information Sheet and reiterated before the focus group sessions.

Lastly, the research study was approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and was in accordance with the Unitec New Zealand policy and procedures guidelines.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the qualitative approach to the research study on middle leadership of teams in large New Zealand secondary schools. By using a qualitative methodology it has enabled a rich, deep and analytical approach to be adopted. Data instruments including the open-ended questionnaire and focus groups have been described with attention given to the sampling and data analysis of each method employed. These methods have been triangulated in order to provide research rigour to the design and analysis of the study. Finally, ethical considerations have been addressed and discussed.

Chapter Four

DATA RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the data gathered during the research on Middle Leaders of Teams in four large New Zealand secondary schools, through the Open-Ended Questionnaire to Heads of Faculty (HOFs) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members and the four Focus Group sessions which included Heads of Departments. Nineteen participants completed the Open-Ended Questionnaire; 12 Senior Leaders and 7 Heads of Faculty from the participating schools (n=19). These were administered by my contact person in each school via email or hard copy, collected and returned to me in a sealed envelope. There were 24 participants in the Focus Group sessions, with 5-7 Heads of Department (HODs) in each group (n=24). Each session was recorded and transcribed by the researcher to facilitate analysis.

As detailed in chapter three, a deeper, more interpretive approach was required in order for me to make sense of the topic and of the participant's perception of their reality, their expectations of their middle leadership role, their relationships and challenges with others while they attend to the daily business of teaching and learning within their faculties. I have carefully coded the data and used a low-technology option in order to identify emerging themes. Seven main themes were evident from the findings which are: Role demand and complexity, Leadership versus Management, Increased workload and intensification, People management, Team work and Distributed leadership, Communication, and Professional support. These themes also emerged in the literature review, hence these two chapters have close links. The following chapter displays the findings which are summarised into the respective themes with three different perspectives shown under each main theme.

Question one: What are the expectations of middle level team leaders?

Role Demand and Complexity

The theme of middle leaders being a critical component within each school was evident from the data. Not only were they seen as crucial positions especially by senior leaders but they were also described as demanding and challenging roles.

Senior Leadership perspectives

Nine out of 12 senior leaders indicated middle leadership was a significant, demanding and complex role in today's secondary schools. The following comments convey these leader's thoughts about how critical this role is to improving the teaching and learning of department teams. School C's current area of focus in response to their most recent Education Review Office (ERO) recommendation is on how their middle leaders (TCRs) can be more fully involved in leading learning:

> *There is no question that the focus we have put on the leading learning aspect of the TCR role demands much more, cognitively from TCRs and it will have implications on who is appointed to those positions. (SLTC3)*

The senior leaders in these four large secondary schools saw a distinction between the two different middle leadership roles within their schools, however they conveyed the idea that both the HOF and HOD role are often combined which adds further complexity to their role. As the Director of Learning at School B stated:

> *Our HOFs have a quite specific and limited role, viz.; they represent their faculties on the Academic Committee, which is a forum and advisory group to the Executive and BOT. They facilitate the 2 way flow of information from the Committee to the members of their faculty. Mathematics and English are single*

subject faculties and thus the HOF role is part and parcel of their HOD role. In other faculties the tasks of HOFs are separate and additional to their roles as HODs. (SLTB2)

The context and structure of the organisation dictates these two roles. It was evident that all four schools saw the HOF role as a pivotal link between Senior Leadership Teams and the Department team. Five senior leaders out of 12 emphasised that HOFs were seen as conduits, enabling the flow of communication from the top to filter down to teachers, as an important aspect of their role as a middle leader.

The multi-faceted role of middle leadership is conveyed through several means according to SLT participants, namely through the formal channels such as: job descriptions, HOD meetings, professional development, Appraisal, Academic Committee meetings, email, and staff briefings. On the other hand there were comments such as: through informal conversations, informal meetings, everyday conversations, and through the reinforced philosophy of the school as one senior leader stated:

The roles and expectations of the HODs and HOFs apart from being spelled out in detail in job descriptions…….is the unique philosophy, culture, traditions and systems of the school. It is expressed and reinforced constantly both explicitly and implicitly, particularly by the Headmaster. (SLTB2)

Heads of Faculty perspectives

The Heads of Faculty in each school also commented on the critical aspect of their role in terms of conveying information to their departments and saw themselves as a filter of

information and a buffer between the two teams. In School D the HOF of Mathematics commented on the essential link they have when she said:

HOFs become a medium between the department members and the senior management team. (MLTD1)

Furthermore, three out of the four schools saw the HOF role as part of the Senior Executive and words and phrases such as: *oversees, co-ordinates, conduit, medium, liaises with, and filterer of information* were repeated in their responses. In School B, one HOF participant described the HOF role as significant in terms of strategy by commenting:

The HOF role is to sit on the Academic Committee and make decisions about Academic issues and strategies affecting the whole school. Each HOF liaises with the respective HOD in their particular faculty. (MLTB2)

Words such as: *demanding, very busy, complex, very dedicated, and work extremely hard* were littered in these HOF responses when describing how central and necessary the role of middle leadership is within the school.

Heads of Department perspectives

In the four focus groups, HODs consistently commented on how challenging and demanding middle leadership was for them, which linked to the range of challenges they face. However, they saw middle leaders as essential roles within the school, further echoing the ideas from both senior and faculty leaders. In School A one participant stated:

Yeah, the senior managers have some sort of vision and direction for it but the middle managers are the big cog within the whole structure. So I feel that as middle managers we play a really important part in how the school feels……you are kinda that middle type of person that is interfacing the staff and students and to me that's a very vital role in the school. If you take that middle group out, it will fall, it will wobble and it will fall. (FGA4)

Each of the four participating schools offered the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) but also Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) in a number of subjects, however School B offered a complex, multi-curriculum based pathway that offers special challenges for middle leaders in terms of their responsibility. One HOD of History comments how the organisation distributes remuneration in terms of Management Units to show recognition for the variety of middle leadership roles.

I think one of the things HODs cotton on to early on is with a complex, academic pathway, there needs to be delegation and I have a senior teacher who looks after NCEA and I look after CIE primarily. To actually do both would be a very challenging job, you know, along with our other responsibilities…..so I think the delegation and distribution of Management Units by the school within that framework is very, very important for us to be effective. (FGB6)

The six middle leaders in School B felt the school shared roles well within each department and compensated teachers accordingly. Whereas, this was not the case in School C, where HODs felt very disgruntled by the lack of Management Units and recognition they got for their demanding, critical positions.

One HOD frustratingly pointed out:

> *There isn't enough recognition for the extra hard work. We are a big department and there are six Management Units in it and we have 22 staff! I think this has been a big bone of contention this year, there isn't enough Management Units and staff think they are pulling their weight enough and think well, you've got the unit, you can do it! (FGD1)*

The critical and pivotal role of middle leadership is seen clearly by all three perspectives in the four participating schools shown by the summary table below.

Table 4.1: Summary of perspectives on role demand and complexity

Perspectives	Key Points	Experience of Respondents
Senior Leadership	- Pivotal to school success - Critical and demanding	*Middle leadership role is pivotal to school success – their leadership role works in both directions – upwards to SMT and downwards to their teachers. (SLTD3)* *HODs have critical and demanding roles as middle team leaders. Many have large departments and are line managers of between 6 and 20 staff. (SLTB2)*
Heads of Faculty	- Conduit for SLT - Complex and demanding	*Being a medium between the department members and the senior management team. (MLTD1)* *HOD role is more detailed, multi-dimensional and demanding. (MLTB2)*
Heads of Department	- Multi-faceted and time-consuming - Time pressures	*There needs to be delegation. (FGB6)* *What I find is that you do less preparation time for your own teaching. (FGD7)*

Leadership versus Management

Senior Leadership perspectives

When describing the role of the middle team leader (HOFs/HODs) within each school, the theme of leadership versus management was clearly conveyed. A common theme between all four schools from the senior leader's perspective was that middle leaders were to lead learning and to lead teams. The following comments typify their responses about middle leadership:

> *They lead a team to achieve good, thorough, robust processes so that fantastic learning can occur. (SLTA1)*

The Headmaster from School B concurs when he wrote:

> *They are academic leaders.*

Interestingly, another Senior Leader from School C summed up the middle leader's role as:

> *HODs (TCRs) role is shifting from administrative to leaders of learning.*

All 12 SLT responses included words or phrases that focused on leadership of a curriculum area, indicating that for middle leaders there is an expectation from senior leaders that they are more than just managers. They are in fact expected to lead learning within their departments. Indeed, SLTC3 noted:

They should lead learning. Not get caught up with the administrative, managing aspects of the role but to truly lead learning so that teachers develop expertise helping students to learn.

As part of their role as middle leader of teams, the senior leadership participants indicated a focus on management tasks and administration yet these were not as strong as the leadership focus and often displayed at the end of the paragraph and seen as an afterthought. Comments such as:

There are also a range of administrative tasks to either complete of delegate. (SLTA2)

Also to monitor and track student achievement within their departments. Also to manage the resources (physical/financial) and personnel in the department. (SLTC3)

Ironically, only six out of the twelve respondents indicated a management focus for middle leaders yet many schools still call their middle leaders, "middle managers" indicating that the management function is prominent.

Heads of Faculty perspectives

Seven HOF participants completed the open-ended questionnaire in three out of four schools. Unfortunately, I received no HOF responses from School A which has limited the perspectives of these middle leaders. All seven participants included management type activities in their responses and only one indicated *leaders of learning (MLTC2).*

MLTB1 concisely summed up the middle leader's role as:

> *It is very complex at times trying to juggle teaching, administration and the management of the day-to-day activities of both the students and department staff. Also being the timetabler of the large school, only adds to complexity of the job.*

An HOF from the same school echoes this idea saying:

> *This is a very busy position ensuring all documentation, schemes, prescriptions and day-to-day administration of the school is up to date. This is on top of your normal teaching role, extra-curricular responsibilities and managing staff.* (MLTB3)

Heads of Department perspectives

The focus groups comprised curriculum middle team leaders (HODs) from the four participating schools. The leadership versus management theme produced some insightful comments from these leaders. In two different schools the discussion centered on how in order to be a good leader you also need to be a good manager. The two aspects were seen as intertwined. Comments such as:

> *It is difficult to distinguish between the two. You have to do both. Be a good manager and be a good leader. You have to gain respect from the people who are working for you. If you don't have that respect then it is a mighty hard job.* (FGC1)

Participants from school A echoed this idea by saying:

> *Leadership and management are two different roles but they can overlap. The words themselves speak clearly about what they are. Management is about sort of getting in there and helping, organizing, directing. Whereas Leadership is about having a vision, being able to inspire, that sort of thing. It's those two different things but there is an overlap. I don't think you can lead without being able to manage. (FGA4)*

Building relationships within teams is essential in order to be a good leader and manager of your department suggested the HODs from the four focus group discussions. It is important to have strong, positive relationships and they saw that as part of their role as a middle leader it was necessary to develop these relationships with their colleagues.

> *There's one thing to say, hurrah, let's go forward but then you turn around and there's no one behind you….so developing key relationships is a key element in the whole structure of the school, establishing key relationships in terms of taking the school in a direction. Leadership is about getting 'buy in' you know, hoping they will lock into that idea or vision. (FGA4)*

A participant from school B developed this important theme further when he said:

> *I feel that leadership is that everyone wants to see you can do what you ask others to do. If you can do it yourself, then others will say, well I can do it too.*

That happens a lot in our department; we keep together as a team. It works well. (FGB4)

The same idea of 'walking the talk' in terms of building good relationships within your teams is endorsed by a middle leader in School D:

Leadership is about sharing and modeling how you do it yourself……I think it starts with the leader, modeling and believing and valuing as part of relationship building and then showing that. (FGD3)

In each focus group, it was evident that management tasks dominated the work of these middle leaders yet they wanted to spend more time on the *'big picture stuff'*. There was a clear frustration from the participants in school C who emphasised that the administrative aspects of the job were taking up valuable time that could be used more effectively in pursuing the leadership aspects of the job. The following response typifies the feelings from the middle leaders in School C:

You'd like to be spending more time with the teachers and directing them, talking with them and so on, leading the learning as we say. But you find that the pile on your desk gets higher and higher and you have to back and do that…….We should be involved in teacher and student learning more so that we are and I feel every year I am losing that. We are expected to do more of this – less of that. (FGC3)

Table 4.2: Summary of perspectives on leadership versus management

Perspectives	Key issues	Experience of respondents
Senior Leadership	• *Curriculum leaders*	*They lead learning, first and foremost by demonstrating and role modeling best teaching practices. (SLTC1)*
Heads of Faculty	• *Management focused rather than leading*	*Co-coordinator, facilitator, filter, communicator, advocate for staff working conditions, counselor, moderator, chief marker, housekeeper. (MLTD2)*
Heads of Department	• *Leading and managing are intertwined*	*Leading is about managing people well. (FGA1)* *I don't think it's possible to be a good leader without being a good manager first. (FGA2)*

Question two: What are the challenges of middle level team leaders while performing their role?

Increased workload and intensification

Senior Leadership perspectives

Increased workload and intensification linked to changes in education was a key theme indicated in the senior leadership responses as a main challenge middle leader's face. Eight out of 12 included change to the revised New Zealand Curriculum and NCEA assessment as the main challenge because middle leaders bear the brunt of managing these changes within the school and as a result, workload intensification has increased. The words *constant* or *continuous* were frequently used when describing these changes adding to the intensification of workload and the obvious ramification of demands on the middle leader's time.   Seven out of 12 senior leaders listed time restraints as a challenge for middle leaders as they implement changes and carry out their day-to-day tasks. The following comments typify the sympathetic feelings of senior leaders:

The last decade has seen almost continuous change in curriculum and assessment. (SLTB2)

They have to keep up to date with the continuous changes from NZQA - poor things. (SLTA1)

Depending on the school context, the idea of change within the school was evident, especially in School C where the focus for middle leaders was Leadership of Learning and the challenges this presents. As one SLT from this school acknowledged:

Some are still coming to terms with the challenge of leading learning, and so this would present a challenge for some, as they are used to <u>managing</u> rather than leading. (SLTC3)

Heads of Faculty Perspectives

Heads of Faculty (HOFs) conveyed similar thoughts as senior leaders to the external challenge of changes to the curriculum and assessment in New Zealand at present. Six out of seven participants indicated managing change as a major challenge for them whereby:

Realignment of NCEA. Much of this has been left to HOFs to implement among staff. (MLTC1)

Five out of seven indicated pressure on their time to adequately complete all non-teaching responsibilities as a significant challenge.

Heads of Department perspectives

Interestingly, only three Heads of Department out of 24 when asked about what they considered as their main challenge responded with curriculum changes. Eight out of 24 HODs indicated dealing with staff as a challenge, while another eight indicated time as a considerable challenge. Lack of support, having patience, direction, collaboration and workload all gathered one response each from these middle leaders.

Although only three indicated the current curriculum changes as a challenge, it was evident that workload intensification and the challenge of managing their time were interlinked with the extra administrative duties and working in their teams, in order to distribute some of the tasks that these curriculum changes have surfaced. In School B, which has a dual pathway, one HOD alluded to the fact that the current curriculum changes had been ignored. Whereas another HOD in the same school contradicted this statement by saying:

> *I don't think we can ignore it but we can do our best to manage it. It is certainly going to leave its paper trail. (FGB6)*

Middle leaders in these focus groups showed an increasing frustration and irritation to the constant change that is occurring. Indeed, a growing degree of cynicism was displayed in several comments during one focus of discussion at School C.

> *The change has become the constant. That's the way I see it. Ummm, I'm not sure if it's created to keep me down or keep us guessing or whatever, but that's how it feels after a while…..you get cynical after a while. (FGC4)*

While another HOD showed his increasing irritation at the changes when he angrily expressed:

> *I think there is a feeling of lack of control over the changes and what is happening. You think of the assessment, my god, who dreamed that up? And for this realignment next year, the assessments they give are awful. They are damn awful and I know damn well they will be ram-rodded through no matter what my input is or will be - they will happen!* (FGC1)

Not only were comments about the curriculum changes evident but the theme of increased workload and intensification linked to change was also conveyed through comments from HODs. New technology in the classroom, the changes in student behaviour over time and the increasing technological advancements in the form of email and being linked into school systems that make middle leaders and teachers accessible to everyone in the wider school community, have all increased workload. This accessibility is putting increased pressure and angst on staff, which in turn falls on the already over-burdened middle leader to help support staff when dealing with these issues.

Workload intensification linked to change was more significant in the focus group discussions than the SLT and HOFs comments, whereby middle leaders felt their jobs *were all consuming* and made comments such as:

> *The amount of administrative tasks we are asked to do has increased. It has got bigger and bigger and bigger and we are asked to do them to satisfy the person immediately above us. (FGD6)*

As well as the intensification of workload, middle leaders felt an overwhelming pressure on their time in dealing with the current external changes driven by changes in policy, in combination with their organizational role, teaching role and co-curricular role. Workload intensification as a result of the increased external changes linked to the lack of time, was a strong, recurring theme from these middle leaders and reflect the constant pressure they are under in their critical role as middle leader of teams.

Table 4.3: Summary of perspectives on increased workload and intensification

Perspectives	Key Issues	Experience of respondents
Senior Leadership	• External changes have increased workload	Middle leaders are trying to 'manage' change which is vague or fluctuating as MOE and NZQA keep on making alterations. (SLTC2)
Heads of Faculty	• Managing change is a challenge • Time pressures	Main academic challenges currently relate to the increase in internal assessment in NCEA and the move to all Year 11 doing IGCSE in 2011. (MLTB2) Time (I think is universal). (MLTD1)
Heads of Department	• Workload intensification • Constant and pace of change • Time pressures	You are juggling – continually. (FGD4) The big challenge is the constant changing demands of the curriculum….it is huge because of the management of that change. (FGC2) Time is a huge thing for me. I teach 5 classes. I've given up my non-contacts with anything to do with teaching. It's all to do with some report, exams, some ;'thing' I have to do, you know, it's quite hard. (FGA5)

People Management

Senior Leadership perspectives

The open-ended questionnaire garnered responses that conveyed the appointment of specialist staff in subject areas was of increasing concern for middle leaders and the schools as a whole. Obtaining good, capable staff was seen as an ongoing challenge in School B where one senior leader mentioned:

> *It is harder to find confident, capable staff. NB: fewer New Zealander's teaching and some subjects you cannot attract food teaching staff eg; maths/physics/accounting. (SLTB1)*

However, in terms of dealing with staff problems it became evident during the study that senior leaders are aware of staff issues which middle leaders often have difficulty addressing. The following table shows some of these issues.

Table 4.4: Senior Leadership Team perspective of people management problems for middle leaders.

Staff Problem	SLT perspective /12
Non-performing Staff Members	3
Meeting Deadlines	3
Staff reluctant to change	4
Not meeting marking commitments	3
Saboteurs	1
Difficult staff/personality clashes	4
Lack of motivation	3

Heads of Faculty perspectives

Middle leaders perhaps show a more accurate response to this theme with five out of seven from the open-ended questionnaire indicating a level of dissatisfaction with the human resources allocated to them. With burgeoning school rolls these middle leaders

find increasing pressure on not only physical resources but the human resources are compounding the challenges they face. In School B a participant expressed:

> *Finding quality staff to replace those that move out of teaching, retire or the staff that get promoted. (MLTB1)*

Furthermore, the sizeable departments that some HOFs have to lead, provided a challenge in itself with many faculties comprising of over 20 staff. Added to this are the co-curricular demands on staff that are taken away from their teaching time which can, in turn, cause disruption to classes.

Heads of Department perspectives

From the focus group discussions, two distinctive issues related to the theme of resourcing became evident. In School B and C, the human resources were seen as more of a challenge for middle leaders in terms of retention and recruitment, whereas physical resources were seen as a challenge and constraint in Schools A and D. Interestingly, School B and C are very traditional, single-sexed schools who both commented on their ageing staff and retaining quality teachers. The HOD of Latin in School B reflected:

> *I've got a department that has oodles of experience, you know, they've been here 20-30 years. There is so much knowledge there which is really good but at the same time you've got a department that is ageing and in the twilight of its career and it is difficult when they can't handle the changes in the students……..trying to keep them enthused about what they are doing is almost impossible. Yeah, I find that quite challenging. (FGB4)*

Staffing issues such as recruitment, retention and continuity were more evident in schools B and C. In School B a participant commented on the lack of staff continuity in some departments which made her job a challenge when she expressed:

Most of our staff are from the United Kingdom, and they only come and stay for a year and the most recent one was 6 months! So I've been an HOD for 2 years but they leave for whatever reasons, pregnancy or whatever, so it's really hard to have some sort of continuity. (FGB3)

Within the same discussion an HOD from the United Kingdom defended this point by conceding:

I would agree that continuity can be a problem on one hand but on the other hand some of those teachers we do get from the United Kingdom, they come in and they work with massive enthusiasm for those 2 years and they are a total breath of fresh air. (FGB2)

In School C one HOD commented on how his subject has difficulty getting staff and he has to manipulate other members of staff to teach his subject *chatting them up to see if they are prepared to teach Chemistry. (FGC3)*

The human resources in terms of recruitment, retention and continuity pose increasing challenges to these middle leaders as they try to implement quality teaching programmes and provide the best teaching for their students. The ongoing demands of human resources were seen as a demanding and problematical aspect to the middle

leader's job.   Emotive words and phrases were used throughout the discussions, indicating uneasiness about tackling these testing situations and dilemmas.

I hate those confrontational situations….it's not good, it's draining and depressing. (FGD7)

Staff problems as indicated in Table 4.4 need to be addressed according to these middle leaders but actually tackling them provide the challenge as one leader stated:

It's those difficult conversations that you have to have. It is one of the areas that people in middle leadership roles have the least experience in and those difficult conversations are hard because they are your colleagues and you have to work with them every day. (FGC2)

An important point was made in School C where one dis-satisfied middle leader declared:

Sometimes you end up with a difficult situation that is not of your making and you get asked to fix it and that really rankles with me. There is sometimes no reason why the SLT couldn't go straight to the person, but you know, they will come in and get the HOD to do something about it. (FGD6)

The feeling that when faced with people challenges they need to be dealt with came through clearly, with all 24 participants indicating that you cannot avoid these issues. However they can be very time-consuming, stressful and test middle leadership skills.

The challenge of working with people in a team, building the team and maintaining its effectiveness is integral to managing the internal and external tensions of the job suggested the middle leaders of these four focus groups. Team work for 12 out of 24 participants consisted of working towards a common objective or vision. Only one HOD took on everything for her small department and did not see team work as vital to her role. The focus groups remarked on how the negative aspects of building an effective team were focused around people management. One middle leader elaborated on the difficulty of teachers who don't share the same vision and expressed:

> *The greatest difficulty as a middle leader of a team is the teacher who isn't prepared at times to go with the team decision, wants to go it alone. (FGB2)*

Table 4.5: Summary of perspectives on people management

Perspectives	Key Issues	Experience of Respondents
Senior Leadership	• *Demanding and problematical* • *Obtaining good staff*	*Harder to find capable staff. (SLTB1)* *Managing non-performing staff. (SLTB2)*
Heads of Faculty	• *Difficult to manage sizeable departments* • *Recruitment and retention*	*HOF of large faculty not only has administrative oversight but more hands on responsibility. (MLTC1)* *There is a large quantity of applicants but the quality of applicants are few and far between). (MLTB1)*
Heads of Department	• *Time-consuming* • *Stressful* • *Tests leadership skills* • *Building effective teams*	*They can be horrendously time-consuming but it has to be dealt with, it has to be done, even if you don't like it. (FGD7)* *It causes an awful lot of stress. (FGD1)* *The toughest thing for me is the one or two people who wouldn't come to the party…..some of them are not willing to do something and others are. (FGB4)*

Question three: How do middle level team leaders deal with these challenges?

Team work and Distributing Leadership

Senior Leadership perspectives

The challenge of people management with regard to team work has already been highlighted. However, the theme of team work and distributing leadership was also revealed as a way of coping with the mounting workload middle leaders of teams face. There were limited responses regarding team work and distribution of leadership from SLT participants, nevertheless two participants from School B commented on one of the specific tasks that middle leaders do well, was encouraging a collegial environment:

> *There is a strong sense of collegiality that exists within departments and within the staff as a whole. (SLTB2).*

Two senior leaders also suggested that the most important aspect of a middle leader's role was to ensure that the staff performed to the best of their ability and worked together as part of a team to enhance teaching and learning. A senior leader from School C commented:

> *Keep the faculty working together. (SLTC1)*

While another leader from the same school commented on how communication and modelling was essential in order to deal with continual challenges:

> *Continued communication and sharing of best practice. (SLTC2)*

Heads of Faculty perspectives

There were minimal responses from HOFs regarding team work and distributing leadership as a way of coping with the challenges middle leader's face, but the essential element of trust was seen as imperative in order for middle leaders to operate effectively. The issue of trust was more evident in school B than any of the other schools in the study with comments such as:

> *There are high expectations with a significant amount of trust allowing you to just get on with the job. (MLTB3).*

Another HOF in School B suggested that the most important aspect of a middle team leader's role was:

> *Team management – keeping the Departmental staff as much as possible focused, happy and on task. (MLTB1)*

Furthermore, the same HOF commented on how having a common goal is imperative to ensuring excellent results for their students when he said:

> *If we have a common goal, we can work as a team to achieve it and then get the best results for our students. (MLTB1)*

Heads of Department perspectives

The focus group participants promoted the point that by having strong, effective teams allows the middle leader to encourage team members to participate in decision-making, support colleagues and also some of the administrative tasks which lessens the burden on middle leaders. Conversely, there was a reluctance to delegate jobs to other members of the team as seen by this participant:

I would never delegate anything. I have the management units so I see that as my responsibility to do things…..I have stuff delegated to me and only have one hour to do it in, so I am not handing it on to anyone else. It's a workload issue. (FGA5)

Whereas, a new HOD in School D conveyed:

I felt the pressure to do all this stuff myself. I wasn't good at delegating you know, so I was making a lot more work for myself. But now I am delegating, just letting people know what I want them to do and they go away and do it. (FGC3)

Team work for 12 out of 24 HODs consisted of working towards a common objective or vision and helping each other out as one middle leader suggested. Similar to the HOF responses, the HODs commented on the important element of trust which needs to be part of the team in order for middle leaders to share the leadership within the department as one HOD indicated:

It is essential that you give somebody, especially if they have a management unit, to carry and deliver with that responsibility, so I interfere in a minimum way. (FGB5)

Team work and distributing leadership was also seen as a way of minimising the workload in terms of producing new resources for teaching programmes as one HOD commented:

We are a department with massive expertise and people are more than happy to share that. It means everyone isn't reinventing the wheel all the time. (FGB2)

The theme of team work was seen as an essential component of the middle leader's role in terms of dealing with the tensions and complexities of the job as one leader expressed metaphorically:

You put a lot of time into making your staff feel happy and valued because then you…put the deposits in, you'll be able to take the withdrawals out. (FGD3)

However, team work was also seen as a challenge for these HODs who indicated a number of factors that work against the team which included: dealing with difficult personalities, unwilling staff, individuals who undermine the team, scattered staff, staff who don't pull their weight, and having no '*buy in*'. One HOD from School C indicated that the sheer size of a department team can also hinder a department team's effectiveness as *the bigger the team the harder it is to build. (FGC2)*

Despite the difficulties of teams work, the reward of being part of a collegial, supportive and team-based department was concisely and perhaps cynically stated when FGD1 declared:

Collegiality is part of team work. It is the only way we survive! (FGD1)

Table 4.6: Summary of perspectives on team work and distributing leadership

Perspectives	Key Issues	Experience of Respondents
Senior Leadership	• Collegiality	Keep the faculty working together. (SLTC1)
Heads of Faculty	• Trust in the team essential in order to share the leadership	As more teachers can share responsibilities in a cooperative manner the strength of the department will increase. (MLTD1)
Heads of Department	• Minimises workload • Coping mechanism • Trust in team essential • Collegiality important • Shared goals • Sometimes team work is difficult	Sharing the load when times are tough. (FGA1) Sharing resources is a big one….everyone pulls together and taken responsibility for a certain activity, job or role…. (FGD7) Working as a team is having the leadership, the confidence in your team. (FGC6) There is a lot of collegial support. It's huge. (FGD1) It's not about the individual, it's the whole. It's about having a common goal. (FGA4) When there is no buy in from the group, so they don't do justice to it. (FGA2)

Professional Development Support

Senior Leadership perspectives

The senior leaders answered a question about the professional development support middle leaders get as they struggle with the increasing demands and challenges they face. Eleven out of 12 SLT members indicated external professional development support was accessible. The senior leaders in all four schools commented on how each school provides ready access to professional development opportunities and middle leaders are encouraged to attend external professional development in the forms of: moderator and best practice workshops, cluster meetings, national conferences, subject association meetings, and annual conferences.

Seven SLT participants commented on how internal professional development support was given to middle leaders in terms of: mentoring, providing advice, and support. Schools B, C and D only indicated internal professional development and support was given when seen as necessary. There were no comments regarding formal internal professional development support of training given to middle leaders.

Heads of Faculty perspectives

Six out of seven HOFs agreed with the SLT participants about the accessibility of external professional development support. However, there was a clear frustration about the worth of external professional development available. Four out of seven HOF participants indicated discouragement. An HOF clearly summed up the feelings of these HOFs:

> *There are some courses available but generally, very little support, consultation or in fact any feedback…..Generally there appears to be no one listening to the people who know what is going on in the classroom. (MLTB1)*

School C participants who are located outside of Auckland indicated there is limited access to external professional development:

> *Some PD but dependent on local availability. For years 9 and 10 there has <u>been very little</u> available. (MLTC1)*

These HOFs also indicated that professional development support impacted on their available time. Three out of seven commented on this aspect and the following quote typifies their responses:

> *I have been to three PD sessions – each has changed perspective as the Matrix has evolved. Two of these in my own time. (MLTC1).*

Three HOFs agreed that internal professional support was given to middle leaders through advice and guidance from senior leaders but no HOFs commented on formal internal professional support provisions.

Heads of Department perspectives

Three out of four focus group sessions placed some importance on professional development as a means of support when dealing with their current challenges especially in terms of subject associations which *…can be helpful by talking with other HODs there. (FGD7).* On the other hand, time to attend these subject association meetings was after school, weekends or school holidays which impacts on the available time for middle leaders.

> *We are getting support from Auckland Maths Association; you know we get regular support and a Saturday morning meeting. (FGD5)*

Smaller subject HODs such as Music and Maori made comments that contrasted with the larger subject areas such as English and Mathematics in terms of external professional development support when they commented:

> *In terms of my subject, well, they are hard….it's difficult….unless you go out and make it happen. (FGA4)*

> *As a smaller subject we have to talk inter-school because there are just not enough of us. (FGD2)*

In School C there was a strong perspective about how external professional development had been reduced in recent years and what was available, was seen as below par. The following excerpts reflect this discussion:

> *It seems to me, somewhat anecdotally, the availability of courses is much reduced for P.D. for middle leaders. Would you agree? (All 6 agree). ……maybe 5 years ago there was more opportunity to go to courses and discuss professional matters like we are dealing with now……(FGC6)*

> *I hate to say this, but I'm gonna. The delivery of these P.D. sessions is amateurish, poor and the number of times I've come away from them, and I think I've just wasted a day from the classroom. They are awful. (FGC1)*

When making comments about internal professional development the middle leaders in School C commented again on how out of touch deliverer's were which added to their irritation:

We've had a few here, they've been out of teaching and they just are not up to it, they are out of touch and we think, well, we know all this. Move on! But they aren't moving on. That was when their time warp was, you know. (FGC4)

Table 4.7: Summary of professional development support

Perspectives	Main Points	Quotation
Senior Leadership	• External and internal P.D. is accessible and readily available • SLT – mentor role	*Encouraged to attend off-site P.D by experts. (SLTC2)* *Our P.D. budget is generous. (SLTB3)* *The Headmaster and Director of studies also act as important mentors. (SLTB2)*
Heads of Faculty	• Subject association support • SLT – mentor role • Limited internal professional development	*Middle team leaders are able to use the senior management for advice and guidance as well as attend (within reason) any course they want. (MLTB2)*
Heads of Department	• Lack of professional development • Professional development is below par • More P.D. is in own time	*I feel they are not up to speed to be honest….So I don't go to a lot of P.D. because I get irritable when I go. (FGC4)* *Yeah, weekends or giving up time in the holidays for a conference. (FGD5)*

Communication

Senior Leadership perspectives

Senior Leaders saw effective communication in terms of discussion as essential for middle leaders when dealing with the challenges they face. Eight out of 12 senior leaders confirmed that communication was vital when dealing with staffing issues like: improving teaching practice, dealing with difficult staff members, and building effective teams. Formal and informal discussion was suggested as a way to *include rather than exclude ideas* wrote one senior leader.

Heads of Faculty perspectives

Heads of Faculty also conveyed that communication was important for middle leaders when dealing with the tensions and complexities of the job. Five out of seven participants commented on how communicating regularly and allowing discussion to take place helped to solve issues and problems. One HOF commented:

> *Meetings, discussions between myself and teachers….. (MLTC2)*

Heads of Department perspectives

According to these middle leaders, they expressed the theme of communication in terms of both informal and formal discussion as vital to the way they build teams, distribute leadership in their departments and improve teaching practice. Each of the four schools promoted this theme within the different discussions. One issue that surfaced was the increasing use of communication via email, which has led to misunderstanding amongst staff:

> *It's a lot easier to talk to a person than to just send off an email because sometimes email, you don't actually mean anything in the email but people can and seem to add things or read between the lines…..face to face, you've had a chance to talk about it and a chance to interact and I think staff appreciate it a lot. (FGB4)*

On the other hand, a first year HOD in the same school showed a different point of view when he said *that email is more prompt and efficient.* (FGB2)

In terms of dealing with people issues however, it was evident in all four schools that dealing with challenging situations there was a need for open and honest discussion. One middle leader commented:

> *If something is not right don't just have a moan behind people's backs. It is professional to get people to come and talk about it. (FGA1)*

Consequently, being honest and open in the way we approach these difficult conversations was certainly an area that middle leader's felt the least prepared:

> *You may have the trust and the notion of communication but it is one of the areas that people in middle leadership roles have the least experience in and those difficult conversations are hard. (FGC2)*

Indeed, there were a range of interesting strategies suggested by middle leaders in order to deal with difficult conversations. These ranged from: using a softly approach, de-personalising issues, manipulating the situation, providing evidence, not avoiding the problem, and communicating with people to find out what is going on. The comments below represent some of these strategies:

> *The softly approach…..handling people on a personal level not an impersonal level. I guess in some ways, with 'kid gloves'. (FGB1)*

A strategy I use is to de-personalise issues. One of the greatest challenges is try and address the issue with the person so they don't see it as a threat or a challenge. (FGB6)

Table 4.8: Summary of perspectives on communication

Perspectives	Key Issues	Experience of Respondents
Senior Leadership	• Effective communication is vital	Must be able to communicate and have emotional intelligence. (SLTB1) Have strong people skills. (SLTC1)
Heads of Faculty	• Discussion is important	Meeting face to face….(MLTD2)
Heads of Department	• Be honest and open with communication • Informal and formal discussion is important	Communication is the key, if you don't communicate with your staff, you're a gonner. (FGC4) We are constantly communicating. Often informally. (FGD6)

Collegial Support

Senior Leadership perspectives

Various support networks including: personal, department team, senior leadership team, and from other colleagues and experience were indicated as ways middle leaders rely on for support when dealing with the wide variety of challenges and tensions they face. Six senior leaders from the four different schools commented on how they fulfil a supportive role in terms of mentoring for middle leaders with comments such as:

Each HOD reports to a senior manager who has responsibility for their department and so the senior manager can in many cases act as an advocate, advisor or support person where required. Trust is also a strong element. (SLTD3)

….senior leaders also act as important mentors. Other members of the executive perform similar roles in relation to appraisal and HR issues. (SLTB2)

Heads of Faculty perspectives

When describing the relationship between senior leaders and HOFs, six HOF participants indicated a *supportive, collegial and encouraging* relationship was evident. As one HOF commented:

Professional. Collegial. Cordial. Must be on same 'wavelength'. (MLTC2)

In contrast to senior leader participant responses, only two HOFs out of seven participants indicated that senior leaders were seen as mentors in terms of giving advice and guidance to middle leaders, as one HOF wrote:

Middle team leaders are able to use the senior management for advice and guidance…… (MLTB2)

Heads of Department perspectives

For HODs in School A, there was contrasting information given from the various middle leaders regarding internal senior leadership support. One middle leader said:

I truly believe I get strong support from SLT, in terms of what the school is wanting me to try and make happen in the school in relation to my area. (FGA4)

While another middle leader reported:

> *There is a lot of support in certain areas, the student support, the staff support within the department but there are things I can go to SLT and get support but there are other things I get no support. Often I'll get a listener but that's where it ends. (FGA3)*

There was inconsistency with the positive support senior leaders give, which was also evident in School D when one middle leader commented:

> *I think it depends on who that senior manager is….if you get a good one, they can be an invaluable source of support and they can back you up if there is an issue that is a little bit sensitive or contentious…….this year I am very lucky, but other years I haven't been as happy and can actually feel that they are even undermining you and making your position quite difficult. (FGD7)*

Not only do senior leaders become areas of support but members of the department team, other HOD's, colleagues and personal friends become valuable support networks for middle leaders. An HOD of Maori in School A pointed out:

> *I think for me, being in this huge department (he only has himself) I draw on my support with other people I work closely with such as the HOF of languages, so I get my support there…..In terms of outside support I have a friend I talk with a lot outside. (FGA4)*

Learning from others' experience and their own experiences was a sub-theme linked to the support middle leaders receive from others especially when dealing with people issues as one participant stated. While others commented on how experiences dictate the way middle leaders deal with difficult conversations:

> *There's no training or anything for it. It's experience. Sometimes you just get left to deal with it on your own. (FGD6)*

Table 4.9: Summary of perspectives on collegial support

Perspectives	Key Issues	Experience of Respondents
Senior Leadership	• Mentor role for middle leaders	The Headmaster and Executive operate a genuine open-door policy and are freely available to discuss, explain and assist where required. (SLTB2)
Heads of Faculty	• Limited response on Senior Leaders support as mentors	From my point of view, the senior leader's is an excellent role model, listener, generous with her time, advice and is an active, persistent advocate for the department. (MLTD2)
Heads of Department	• Senior Leaders support as mentors • Team support • Experiential learning	I can go to my HOF who is knowledgeable; who is willing to share and I learn a lot about leadership off him. (FGD3) The HODs can support each other. (FGD1) We don't get a lot of time to reflect. Afterwards you wish you had done it differently. (FGD7)

Summary

The data revealed that middle leaders of teams have a complex, crucial and demanding role which is conveyed from all three leadership perspectives. A range of challenges are dispersed through this middle leadership role which include: increased workload and intensification linked to change and secondly, people management challenges. These

challenges have people and lack of time as an integral component to the tensions they create. According to the data, middle leader's of teams deal with these challenges in a variety of ways including; team work and distributing leadership, through external and internal professional support networks, communication, and support from colleagues and their own experience. Further discussion of the findings linked to the literature reviewed from chapter two will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the significant findings of the research topic on middle leaders of teams in four large New Zealand secondary schools, from the data reported in chapter four. The discussion integrates the literature from chapter two with the thematic findings under the following headings: Role demand and complexity, Leadership versus Management, Increased workload and intensification, People management, Team work and Distribution of Leadership, Professional development support, Effective Communication, and Collegial support. I hope that this discussion will contribute to the wider body of Educational Leadership and Management knowledge that is currently available on middle leadership of teams in New Zealand secondary schools.

Role demand and complexity

Senior leaders, HOFs and HODs agreed that middle leadership, with the increased focus on improving pedagogy within their institutions was a significant yet demanding role in large New Zealand secondary schools. Participants say:

> *Middle leadership role is pivotal to school success – their leadership role works in both directions – upwards to SMT and downwards to their teachers. (SLTD3)*

> *HOD role is more detailed, multi-dimensional and demanding. (MLTB2)*

This thematic finding that has come from the emipirical data can be supported by several notable researchers that middle leadership is important and integral in developing the quality of teaching and learning within the school (Brown, Rutherford & Boyle, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2000; Fitzgerald, Gunter & Eaton, 2006; Naylor, Gkolia & Brundrett, 2006). Also, Busher and Harris (1999) indicated that "within the complex matrix of leadership and accountability, HODs are increasingly acknowledged to be key figures" (p. 307). All of the senior leaders and HOFs in the four schools identified the HOF as a *conduit* or *filterer* of information who conveyed vital information to department teams on the strategy and direction of academic issues and strategies affecting the whole school. New Zealand research carried out by Feist (2008) reinforces this finding whereby HOFs where seen as "a conduit for senior management" (p.60) ensuring that decisions and policies were conveyed to other leaders in their department teams.

Depending on the context of the school, there was a distinction made between the two middle leadership roles of HOF and HOD. A participant in School B for instance, regarded the HOD role as more demanding while the HOF role was very specific and limited to representing their faculties and facilitating the two-way flow of information.

> *Our HOFs have a quite specific and limited role, viz.; they represent their faculties on the Academic Committee, which is a forum and advisory group to the Executive and BOT. ……... HODs have critical and demanding roles as middle team leaders. Many have large departments and are line managers of between 6 and 20 staff. (SLTB2)*

This finding is supported by Hall and Wallace (1996) who indicated that middle leaders within the school-wide policy making process were limited to representing the views of their staff to senior leaders. However, School B conceded that in many cases there was a dual role with HOF and HOD which added an increasing complexity to the middle

leadership role. Again, Feist's (2008) research supports this finding as she found that alongside the 'conduit' role was the substantial role of subject leadership which creates further tensions at the middle.

Further tension was also conveyed by School C participants whereby a current internal focus is on the increased involvement of Teacher's in Charge of Curriculum (TCRs) in the leadership of learning. By emphasising leading learning which adds to the already complex role of middle leadership, this school is *demanding much more, cognitively from TCRs and it will have implications on who is appointed to those positions (SLTC3).* This finding is substantiated by Fitzgerald et al. (2006) that indicated leadership of learning has been devolved to middle leaders adding to the myriad of tensions they face. School C appeared to be more in touch with the latest rhetoric in education within the current context, perhaps brought about by their recent Education Review Office (ERO) visit and recommendations.

An HOD raised the issue that middle leaders are *the big cog in the whole structure (FGA4)* of the school, emphasising the critical, crucial positions in which they are placed. Middle leaders are a*t the interface of staff and students (FGA4)*, with the added complexity of reporting upwards to senior leaders and their department teams. There was a strong feeling from HODs of *being the middle man, the meat in the sandwich (FGD6)* highlighted in the literature by several researchers (Collier, Dinham, Brennan, Deece & Mulford, 2002; Dinham, 2007; Feist, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2000; Kerry, 2005).

However, it was evident that the lack of recognition for these demanding positions was a current issue for middle leaders.   School D participants in particular were very disgruntled by the lack of Management Units (MUs) they received as remuneration for the role however this was not the case in the other schools. Whereas, in contrast, School B participants were positive about how the school shared and distributed roles in

each department team and felt they were compensated accordingly, not only in monetary rewards but in autonomy. Again, the school context and the high-trust leadership model evident in this school promoted this positive attitude. A senior leader in school B indicated that:

> They enjoy a *high degree of trust that is placed in them to simply get on with the job. The school culture is not one of micro-management; of constant meeting and reporting cycles. The flip side of trust of course is accountability and HODs are conscious that they are accountable and I'm sure their professional pride drives them to do a good job. (SLTB2)*

The distribution of leadership and delegation of tasks were issues raised by middle leaders as very necessary in order for them to effectively do their multi-faceted job.

> *There needs to be delegation and I have a senior teacher who looks after NCEA and I look after CIE primarily. To actually do both would be a very challenging job, you know, along with our other responsibilities. (FGB6)*

The shift downwards internally from the apex of the hierarchy (the principal) to the middle tier as identified by Fitzgerald (2007) has resulted in further workload intensification and complexity of the role. This has meant that the distribution of leadership is a way of coping with the current context (Youngs, 2008). As Woods, Bennett, Harvey and Wise's (2004) study of distributed leadership suggests, there needs to be a high degree of team work, collaboration, open-communication and shared goals and beliefs in order for the distribution of leadership to be effective, something that School B confirms in particular.

That face to face communication and collaboration is vital I think. And in terms of team, the staff have to be inputting as well, equally, everyone has to be on the same page don't they? (FGB1)

Therefore, the need to work with others in a team is essential for middle leaders to be valuable contributors to the school as they come to grips with their demanding, vital role within the school.

Leadership versus Management

One of the interesting findings related to the theme of leadership and management was that senior leaders held a contrasting, idealistic view to the middle leaders in the study who are performing the actual, glaring realities of the job. Senior leaders placed more emphasis on the fact that middle leaders should *lead teams* and *lead learning* of their curriculum area than that of their middle leader counterparts. Within this mismatch, there was a strong expectation that middle leaders were more than just managers which added another dimension to their role; that of leading learning within their teams. As previously mentioned, leading learning was a significant focus for School C in particular, where it was noted that the middle leader's role was shifting from managerial to leadership. This shift in responsibility for curriculum delivery from the SLT to the middle is supported by Fitzgerald et al. (2006).

Several studies confirm that middle leaders in today's climate are faced with a wide range of administrative tasks (Brown et al., 2000; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006; Jarvis, 2008), including tasks and responsibilities that have been commonly accepted as part of the senior leadership domain. It is significant that in all four schools HOFs mostly focused their responses around the range of administrative tasks they have to perform as well as their own teaching load, indicating a degree of role ambiguity between the senior leadership and HOF middle leadership perspectives. This role ambiguity was

highlighted with the contrasting HOD responses that saw middle leadership having an interrelationship with leadership and management aspects. This interrelationship is corroborated by Cranston's (2006) study of the ideal and real role of middle leadership, whereby, it was apparent that middle leaders had to be a competent leader and manager in order to deal with their dual role as both leader and manger of department teams. The changing nature of the job, from management to leadership, manoeuvred by the external drivers such as; the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Education Review Office (ERO), to place more emphasis on leadership of learning has been noted by these middle leaders.

HODs in all four schools felt that leadership and management were intertwined and there was an importance placed on mutual respect from the team you are working with, having a vision for the department and developing strong, positive relationships as one participant stated:

> *The best functioning team is one that has the same values, same objectives and moves in the same direction. (FGC6)*

Relationship building with the underlying essential element of trust is essential in team building (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd 2009; Piggot-Irvine, 2003). Furthermore, Cardno (1990) confirms that sharing goals and vision enhances team work. The issue of people management especially in terms of team work is interlinked with this finding, as one HOD concisely said: *Leading is about managing people well. (FGA1)*

Unfortunately, middle leaders felt increasing pressure to complete administrative aspects of their job with limited time available, yet they wanted to spend more time on the leadership aspects such as: developing goals, modelling best practice, talking with

teachers, and being involved in student learning in order to raise achievement levels. This is supported by Collier et al. (2002) who identified that middle leaders by their own admission are currently neglecting and giving up on the professional leadership aspects of the job because of the constraints of time. While Cranston (2006) reinforces the fact that middle leaders desire more time and a greater leadership role but the management aspects were considered more important which probably reflects the reality of their role. Time is one of the key barriers along with increased administrative workload and management tasks which are hindering middle leaders from doing a professional leadership job as one HOD in School C commented:

> *In a sense we are losing time for our professional responsibilities and becoming management driven….pen pushers really.* (FGC3)

The literature provided ample support of time being revealed as a barrier and challenge to the role of middle leader. Limited time available to deal with the multiplicity of management and leadership tasks is noted by many researchers (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Collier et al., 2002; Cranston, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2000) as a negative aspect to the middle leader's role.

The study showed that the shifting focus from management to leadership by middle leaders of teams forced internal re-structuring of the middle leader's position in the secondary school context and that there was the potential for middle leaders to burn out as one middle leader commented:

> *As middle leaders we are meant to be curriculum, you know, linking it all together, students, welfare, you do a little bit here, a little bit there. You are sort of patching the road if you like…..it is quite hard to keep it going, but you do. Oh*

you know, it's enjoyable but I don't know how long you will be able to sustain it.
(FGC4)

The ability to sustain middle leadership is imperative for schools. Constant pressure, changing roles, lack of time and the preoccupation with administration is leaving little time for middle leaders to effectively lead their teams and lead learning, which can in turn lead to role strain, conflict or ambiguity (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Witziers, Sleegers & Imants, 1999). Principals will need to consider this if they want to avoid middle leaders becoming disillusioned with their role and reach their potential as leaders.

Increased workload and intensification linked to change

Senior leaders in the four schools are acutely aware of the increasing workload and intensification of the middle leadership role and have sympathy and are supportive to their respective HOFs and HODs.

> *They have to keep up to date with the continuous changes from NZQA (poor*
> *things). (SLTA1)*

Ultimately though, they see the middle leader's role include the management of these external changes as part and parcel of their job. This contradicts what these senior leaders have said in terms of how they see the middle leadership role as one of leading teams and leading learning. When are they supposed to do this?

Previous studies have supported that the role of middle leadership has intensified (Brown et al., 2000; Fitzgerald, 2007; Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2007). Although only three HODs commented on the current revised New Zealand curriculum changes as a

challenge, it was evident in the four focus groups that there had been an increase in the workload and that *the job just keeps growing and growing (FGC2).* The research confirmed the obvious and unsurprising finding of the issue of time constraints which was linked to the increase in workload. The research findings confirmed (Brown & Rutherford 1998; Collier et al., 2002; Cranston 2006; Fullan 2007; Harris 2000) that the constant workload pressure, meeting demands, deadlines and pressures of the job all erode the amount of time middle leaders have for other aspects of the job, such as: leading teams and enhancing teaching and learning. Again, school context was important, with School D showing an increased frustration with the micro-management style of leadership including: pointless meetings, afterschool meetings, and the lack of departmental time to discuss the recent curriculum changes. An HOD pointed out to the group that:

> *There is just not enough departmental time given in the school even teacher only days. It is normally whole school stuff which isn't that relevant a lot of the time. (FGD7)*

School D participants also commented on the trivial and subservient things that have increased workload and frustration for these middle leaders when one spoke of:

> *One of the things that frustrates me is that we have to spend a lot of time on those low-level things……and the frustration is that I haven't the time to put into the big stuff. (FGD3)*

Linked to the finding of increased workload and intensification for middle leaders was the interesting ramification that middle leaders were highly aware that *the school day for the average 'chalk-face' teacher is getting longer and longer as well. (FGD1).*

Furthermore, in School D a comment was made by one middle leader *that the day is getting very very pressured* and she noticed *that morale (of teachers) is hard to sustain* (FGD1). This was a finding not corroborated by the literature. Similar comments were made in School A by one participant and there was a reluctance in School A and D to *farm out* jobs because they were aware of the impact it has on their department teams. Shielding teachers from increased workload was seen as important in these two schools. Or perhaps these middle leaders perceived a risk, whereby they are reluctant to share the load with others because they fear mistakes may be made for which they will bear the implications as Cranston and Ehrich (2009) suggest.

In contrast, respondents noted in the open-ended questionnaire and with the focus group discussions at Schools B and C *that there needs to be delegation* (FGB6) and distribution of leadership within the department teams was a successful and necessary strategy employed by these leaders. One could argue that empowering leadership within a department team helps to build the "density of leadership" (Southworth, 2004, p.118) which should in turn build leadership capacity and develop future leaders of the school (Harris, 2008). Yet School A and D's awareness of other teacher's workloads should not be diminished as middle leaders have extra demands placed on them from above and understand that distributed leadership as a concept can be seen as "distributed pain" (Grubb & Fleesa, 2006, p.535) onto others.

People Management

Senior leaders and HOFs of Schools B and C were concerned in their traditional, single-sexed environments about their ageing staff and ability to obtain or retain quality teachers. Although both schools were in different cities, they have a similar ethos and school culture. Having an ageing staff could pose negative implications in the future for their institutions.

Finding quality staff to replace those that move out of teaching, retire or the staff that get promoted. There is a large quantity of applicants but quality applicants are few and far between. (MLTB1)

Most importantly, the loss of experience and expertise of ageing staff who are in the twilight of their careers might prove challenging for their schools. A need therefore to cultivate new teachers and develop new and existing middle leaders are aspects the principals will need to consider. As Fitzgerald et al. (2006) assert "the professional development of teachers as leaders is critical to continued innovation and change" (p. 32).

The large size of department teams and faculties was an issue that HOF participants raised in Schools C and D in particular, whereby several middle leaders commented on how they generically look after the faculty and allow the HODs to look after their own specific departments and staff. The empowerment of HODs to take on appraisal was one example given by an HOF in School C. By distributing this leadership opportunity within the faculty he felt it was a positive step in developing leadership capacity, supported by Harris (2008) and Southworth (2004).

People management in terms of dealing with testing situations and dilemmas were seen as more significant for HODs in the four schools than for SLT or HOF participants. Perhaps this is because they bear the brunt of dealing with these situations. Surprisingly, participants indicated in all four focus groups that avoiding these issues was not an option.

They can be horrendously time-consuming but it has to be dealt with, it has to be done, even if you don't like it. (FGD7)

Theory suggests that when dealing with people issues such as dilemmas, many people believe they are irresolvable and therefore avoid dealing with them (Cardno, 2007). Although maybe easier to avoid, they can wreak havoc within a team and organisation if they are not dealt with in a timely and effective manner (Piggot-Irvine, 2003). It was evident that HODs felt uneasy in dealing with testing situations because as one HOD commented *it is something we need more training in. (FGD1)*

The lack of professional training in dealing with testing people issues was a finding I thought was significant because although we can learn through experience and other's experiences, having an external professional development perspective can reinforce or modify how these challenges of people management are dealt with. Adey (2000) confirms the notion that middle leaders are likely to receive very little training to prepare them for their role.

Team building and working with others in teams is another aspect of people management that middle leaders were grappling with, which will be discussed in the next section.

Team work and distributing leadership

Distributing leadership has become prevalent within educational institutions mainly as a response to work intensification and pressures (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Gronn, 2003; Youngs, 2008). A finding of the study shows that distributing leadership and delegating tasks is an important aspect to the middle leader's survival, which has been discussed earlier. Although offered as a way of dealing with the intensification of workload and challenges of their role, middle leaders also need to manage and lead their teams in order for them to be successful at distributing leadership and delegating tasks. Teams have become more prominent and they are considered widespread in secondary

institutions (Cardno, 1999; Witziers et al., 1999). Therefore, both people management and team work/distributing leadership are interrelated.

A finding of the study indicated that team work for 12 out of 24 HODs consisted of working with others towards a common objective or vision. corroborated by (Adair, 1986; Cardno, 1990; Owens, 2004; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Senge, 1990; Witziers et al., 1999; Woods et al., 2004). However, while trying to move the team towards a common goal, a finding from the empirical data revealed that middle leaders are faced with challenges of team work. Team work is not easy (Bell, 1992; Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009) but it is also *the only way we survive* suggested one HOD:

The literature supports the notion that team work and distributing leadership within the team does not happen instantaneously, as patience, humility and the ability to facilitate others is required to make teams work effectively (Bell, 1992; Preskill & Torres, 1999). The negative factors such as: size of teams, difficult personalities, unwilling staff, and time pressures work against the team and have the commonality of being people driven except for the issue of time. Again, the pressure of time threads itself through each of these thematic findings and is considered a strong constraint facing middle leaders who work in teams (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Collier et al., 2002; Cranston, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2000; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). While Fitzgerald et al., (2006) comment that working with and through others can be complex and messy especially when people are involved.

Overall HOD participants considered a number of essential factors were necessary when working in teams, which in turn, helps the department to pull towards the common goal. Delegation/distributing tasks and role and collegial support were fundamental aspects with team work according to Schools B and C, supported by Woods et al. (2004). Aspects of building the team that research participants thought were important

included: communicating, building relationships, empowering and encouraging staff, and trusting team members. Developing trust is seen as vital in working with others and ensuring a successful team suggests several researchers (Cardno, 1998b; Fullan, 2007; Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; West & Derrington, 2009).

Middle leaders need certain qualities and skills such as: honesty, trust, being approachable, empowering, supportive, sensitive, an effective communicator, and modeling in order to build teams proposed participants in the study. These essential ingredients in order to cope with the challenges of team work, which involves the management and leadership of people, included the following common perspectives:

- *Be honest in the way that you communicate. (FGC1)*
- *You have to build relationships. (FGC3)*
- *Try to be consistent. (FGD2)*
- *I do think communication is the key, if you don't communicate with your staff, you're a goner. (FGC4)*
- *Just be sensitive to their feelings and the way they are. (FGB4)*
- *Being approachable, being there; (FGB2) and,*
- *Accepting the people's differences to work together to do something. (FGA3)*

Building effective teams through effective people management and relationship building allows for team work and the distribution of leadership to flourish within department teams (Cardno, 1998b; Fullan, 2007; Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Robinson et al., 2009).

Professional development support

The current literature supports the lack of recognised training for middle leaders (Adey, 2000; Blandford, 1997; Brown et al., 2000). An important finding for the senior leaders was to recognise that by having accessibility to external subject-specific professional

development through best practice workshops, national conferences, cluster meetings, subject association meetings and annual conferences is not enough for middle leaders.

> *It seems to me, somewhat anecdotally, the availability of courses is much reduced for P.D. for middle leaders.   Would you agree?   (All 6 agree). ......maybe 5 years ago there was more opportunity to go to courses and discuss professional matters like we are dealing with now......(FGC6)*

Senior leaders assumed that this type of professional development and support from subject-based programmes is sufficient to develop the skills required for middle leadership. Yet a fundamental element of the middle leadership role is to lead teams of people and lead learning as all three groups indicated, corroborated by Fitzgerald et al. (2006). Furthermore, Cranston's (2006) study confirms this finding that professional development of middle leaders especially in promoting team work is a major issue in Australian schools. Cardno (1998b) also suggested that leadership of teams is usually a middle leadership role and it is necessary for middle leaders to understand about team effectiveness and development of teams.

Although HOFs agreed with the senior leaders about the accessibility of external professional development support, they felt frustrated about what was available. School C felt there was very little professional development available for middle leaders and what there was suggested School D participants, impacted on their professional and personal time. The clear frustration from HODs in the focus groups was that even though there is accessibility to these curriculum professional development networks, again they were impacting on their available time. Smaller subjects felt neglected in terms of professional development choices. Most importantly for senior leaders and outside agencies to understand though, is that from School C in particular there was a

feeling that what professional development there was, is limited, poorly delivered and often not up-to-date.

> *I hate to say this, but I'm gonna. The delivery of these P.D. sessions is amateurish, poor and the number of times I've come away from them, and I think I've just wasted a day from the classroom. They are awful. (FGC1)*

There was no mention from all three groups in all four schools of professional development in terms of building teams and working with others in teams. A point raised by Cranston's (2006) Australian study which highlights this as a major issue in today's context. Cardno (1999) confirms that team work is widespread with New Zealand schools. Team work is an integral component of middle leadership, suggests the senior and middle leaders of this research study, yet middle leaders are expected to 'learn on the job' how to build teams and enhance the teaching and learning within their teams. By their own admission, middle leaders signify a need for more development in the area of people management as discussed earlier. This finding is supported by Naylor et al., (2006).

Furthermore, senior leaders spoke of collegial support in terms of internal mentoring opportunities for middle leaders as did HOFs and HODs in all four schools. There were no comments from any of the participants about formal internal professional development, although the School C focus group participants indicated that they had been exposed to some whole school internal professional development. None-the-less it was seen as a waste of time:

> *XXXXXX came in and I agree with what you guys have said, as not many people came out of that, you know…..enlightened. (FGC3)*

However, the comments made by either senior leaders or HOFs/HODs did not convey that mentoring was formalised in any way instead they were linked to senior leaders being supportive and offering advice and guidance when necessary. An implication would be, that surely some middle leaders who do not ask for help, flounder.

Communication

Unsurprisingly, effective communication was seen by senior leaders, HOFs and HODs as vital to the middle leadership role. All three groups indicated that by ensuring informal and formal discussions take place it helps to build teams, distribute leadership, collaborate and improve teaching practice. These elements help to develop trusting relationships. This is supported by West and Derrington (2009) who assert that if teams trust each other and collaborate, they in turn are more able to achieve their objectives. Developing trust within a team is certainly a challenge for middle leaders suggests Cardno (2002) and Senge (1990) but trust stems from using and engaging in dialogue and discussion with team members.

The issue of email as a form of communication was raised in School B's focus group session with differing perspectives. On the one hand, two older members of the group spoke of interacting *face to face* as they felt emails can often convey mixed messages. In contrast a younger HOD commented that email is *more prompt and efficient* in dealing with staff. West and Derrington (2009) caution the use of email as a means of communication. They suggest using it for information you do not need to communicate face to face but suggest it can be potentially disastrous if it is used to convey thoughts about a sensitive topic or conflict.

A finding that became apparent from the data was that several HODs espoused desire to have open and honest communication especially when dealing with potential conflict.

You may have the trust and the notion of communication but it is one of the areas that people in middle leadership roles have the least experience in and those difficult conversations are hard. (FGC2)

Yet, they indicated this was an area they lacked confidence, it created stress, was very time-consuming and although these problems had to be dealt with, they were dreaded. A range of communication strategies were discussed in all four schools including: manipulating the situation to your advantage, providing evidence, seeking out why there was a problem, de-personalising issues or using a soft approach. This is supported by Cardno's (1998c) research when she indicates that leaders will try one of three approaches when dealing with potential conflict: avoidance; soft-sell; or hard-sell. While Piggot-Irvine (2003) suggests that defensive strategies are commonly used when leaders need to confront a problem involving people. What was interesting was the fact that these middle leaders in all four schools indicated that they learnt these communication strategies through experience, or watching others rather than through any formal channels. As one HOD commented in School D; *there's no training or anything for it. It's experience. (FGD6).* Another HOD commented that she picked up ideas through her Church group:

Through my Church actually we had some conflict management role plays, scenarios and things and I found that really helpful. I loved that because it was realistic and I could see how I could use it at school. (FGD1)

As Adey's (2000) research highlights, the danger of appointing people into middle leadership positions and then expecting them to just get on with it are obvious. An implication being that if a deliberate effort is not made to have high trust and low-defensive interactions the possibility of ever having positive and effective teams may not be reached.

Therefore, it can be surmised that by participating in formal, theoretical and practical professional development with regards to communicating effectively when dealing with conflict, would be advantageous to middle leaders. One HOD at School D commented on how useful some University work was for her as it reinforced her own experiences or challenged her to change what she was doing:

I have done some University work and I must say that it has been really useful. It's getting that external, professional, theoretical basis. (FGD1)

Several New Zealand researchers who are also University practitioners offer possible approaches to dealing with conflict and people issues by using productive conversations (Cardno, 2007; Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Robinson, 2006; Robinson et al., 2009).

Collegial support

The final area of note is that middle leaders need supportive colleagues in order to fulfil the needs of their complicated role supported by (Bennett et al., 2007; Brown & Rutherford, 1998). Yet as one HOD commented, you also need intrinsic motivation:

I don't think any of us would be in the position we are in now if we just relied on other people's support either. If we don't have our own drive, motivation and autonomy it (support) probably wouldn't keep us going. (FGA2)

It was espoused by six senior leaders in four different schools that mentoring middle leaders was a way in which they could provide support. On the other hand, only two HOFs considered senior leaders as mentors. This research indicates that although

senior leaders believe they are playing the part of mentor, perhaps because it is done in an informal way, middle leaders do not perceive this as mentoring support.

An important finding was that two of the schools provided evidence from middle leaders to suggest that senior leadership support was variable and it was dependant on who the senior leader was. Not all senior leaders were seen as giving quality support. A ramification of this being that some middle leaders will not use senior leadership support if they think it is deficient, ineffective or lacking trust therefore, a feeling of isolation becomes evident. Indeed, if middle leaders felt they were not listened to or worse, undermined, then trust was destroyed. The destruction of trust is something that can occur very quickly but by modelling honesty, open-mindedness and having supportive interactions trust can be strengthened suggest Fullan's research (2007). A supportive and trusting environment was apparent in School B more so than in any other school in the study. This was indicated in both the open-ended questionnaire responses and focus group discussion with the feeling of mutual support, autonomy, trusting relationships and supportive teams.

They enjoy a high degree of trust…… The strong sense of collegiality that exists within departments and within the staff as a whole. (SLTB2)

Be prepared to listen, debate and make the final decision based on sound judgement and reason. If we have a common goal, we can work as a team to achieve it and then get the best results for our students. (MLTB1)

Fullan (2007), Garmston and Wellman (1998), Preskill and Torres (1999) and Senge (1990) confirm that teams form connections when members engage in knowledge creation through dialogue, meaningful tasks, forming bonds with other team members which in turn fosters commitment and a shared understanding of the goals of the team and institution. In turn, this should improve collegiality and team work. A high-trust

leadership model was displayed in School B unlike School D and to a lesser extent Schools A and C, whereby a 'them' versus 'us' mentality prevailed. A cynical undercurrent existed in the HOF and HOD responses to many of the issues raised in these three schools.

> *When you talk about support, I think the HODs can support each other. We found that with the new timetable proposal. (FGD7)*
>
> *Yes. We teamed together. (FGD1)*

By *teaming together* this group's behaviour links to Brundrett's (1998) findings whereby collaboration may be espoused but in fact it is not really a collegial environment but rather a clever use of manipulation where groups seek to realise their own goals at the expense of others. However, overall these participants indicated a strong collegial support network existed amongst their department team colleagues. A strong sense of collegiality was apparent in the responses from all four schools with comments such as; *definitely a lot of collegiality support, it's huge (FGD1), sharing the load when times are tough (FGA1)* and *you work together (FGC5).* This finding supports Brown and Rutherford's (1998) study whereby middle leaders were working to create more collegial departments.

Summary

This chapter has provided a discussion of the empirical data and linked it to the literature base from chapter two. The data has revealed that middle leadership is both demanding and exigent. The findings revealed that there is a need for middle leaders to be both a good manager and leader of a department team in order for them to be effective in their role, as they grapple with a changing role, intensification of workload and people management concerns. Middle leaders learn predominantly through

positive and negative experiences that they face, but they require support from others and their department teams to face their challenges. Middle leaders need assistance. The lack of professional training for middle leaders of teams was a critical issue identified by the respondents which links into the final chapter of this thesis where conclusions, limitations of the study and finally recommendations will be discussed.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The motivation for this study stems from my own experience as a middle leader in a large New Zealand secondary school. Over recent years, the job has become over-whelming due to its complexity as it has changed from shuffling paper and doing 'administrivia' to what is now an intricate role which deals with both paper and to a larger extent, people. This study has provided an insight into the complicated role of middle leaders of teams as they try to improve teaching and learning of their subject areas. The study has illustrated the main challenges these leaders face in their time-consuming, multi-faceted position. Furthermore, it has revealed through the data and literature some of the ways middle leaders in today's New Zealand secondary school context deal with these challenges.

The following chapter focuses on three main areas. Firstly, it considers the conclusions drawn from the study and presents these under the three key research questions which include: What are the expectations of middle leaders of teams in New Zealand secondary schools? What are the challenges middle leaders of teams face? How do middle leaders of teams deal with these challenges? The chapter moves onto the limitations of the study and recommendations are supplied for principals of secondary schools and the New Zealand Ministry of Education, before concluding with further recommendations for future study.

CONCLUSIONS

By using a qualitative, interpretive approach I have generated descriptive data from three different perspectives; senior leaders, Heads of Faculty (HOFs) and Heads of

Departments (HODs). The following conclusions and recommendations have been obtained from the empirical data gathered and analysed from the three groups above and the two data gathering methods; open-ended questionnaire and four focus groups. As well as adding to the existing literature on middle leadership of teams, the following conclusions and recommendations may be useful to secondary school leaders and the New Zealand Ministry of Education involved in promoting middle leadership of teams in the New Zealand context.

Middle leaders are just that – positioned in the middle. Their role in the current context is changing from being management driven to leadership driven and overall middle leaders of large New Zealand secondary schools are struggling to find the time to lead their teams effectively. The role is multi-faceted and involves not only dealing with the plethora of paperwork, but to a larger extent, people. This makes the job complicated and problematic as when working with people things can get messy and intricate (Fitzgerald, Gunter & Eaton, 2006). Middle leaders have their own strategies to deal with the myriad of tensions they confront, yet they still need assistance in order to relieve the pressures they face and improve their expertise in order to fulfil the requirements of their changing role.

What are the expectations of middle leaders of teams in New Zealand secondary schools?

This study has identified that middle leadership of teams in large New Zealand secondary schools is complicated, demanding, time-consuming and multi-faceted. The role is integral to improving pedagogy of department teams which in turn enhances the teaching and learning of students supported by (Fitzgerald et al., 2006). The HOF middle leader is a conduit for senior leaders in the institution but is often performing the dual role of HOF and HOD which further complicates their role supported by (Feist, 2008). Heads of Department in large secondary schools bear the brunt of administrative tasks but are now expected to *lead learning* in their department teams which has

created tension in the middle. In today's context, with the revised New Zealand Curriculum (NZC), high expectations have been placed on middle leaders to improve teaching in their teams but they are still being bogged down with the wide range of administrative tasks they are expected to complete supported by Gunter and Fitzgerald (2007).

A conclusion can be drawn from the study that the middle leader's role is changing in New Zealand secondary schools from management to leadership, yet there is limited time available for middle leaders to effectively lead their teams. This raises Jarvis' (2008) question; Has an opportunity for middle leadership been lost? Role ambiguity was also evident in the senior leaders and middle leader participant responses with a focus on leadership from senior leaders, yet middle leaders felt that management tasks dominated their day to day responsibilities. Overall, middle leaders wanted to spend more time on leading their teams and improving pedagogy within their departments but paperwork hinders the leadership aspects of the role. There is a need for role clarity and definition for middle leaders, especially as their role is changing from management, to leadership of teams in the New Zealand secondary school context.

What are the challenges middle leaders of teams face?

Unsurprisingly, lack of time is a barrier that middle leaders face and was evident throughout each of the challenges addressed. The increased workload and intensification of the role is one of the main challenges for middle leaders. Linked to the changing role of middle leadership highlighted above, there was a clear frustration that HODs cannot fulfil the leadership aspects of their job to their full potential. Time pressures have exacerbated this tension.

The leadership model used in each different secondary school environment revealed through the data, either adds to or relieves the challenges of middle leaders. This

conclusion has been reached through the inferences made from the empirical data generated. A micro-management style of leadership certainly hinders effectiveness whereas a high-trust leadership model promotes autonomy and fosters trusting relationships.

Working with and through others is complex and messy suggests Fitzgerald et al. (2006). Dealing with difficult aspects of people management was seen as very important and necessary but also testing for the middle leaders participants. Middle leaders bear the brunt of dealing with these difficult people management situations but overwhelmingly they felt ill-prepared for this aspect of their role, hence, a need for development in this area is required for middle leaders to effectively manage problematical situations.

Building and maintaining effective subject teams was a complex yet integral aspect for middle leaders in order for them to survive in their role. Nonetheless, it also provided challenges for middle leaders who are at the forefront of leading these curriculum teams. The challenges faced by middle leaders of teams are inter-related as they all have the commonality of being people driven except for the pressure of time which threads itself through each of these challenges.

How do middle leaders of teams deal with these challenges?

The study has identified a range of strategies that middle leaders use in order to deal with their current situation. Distributing leadership and delegation of tasks were seen as fundamental aspects as middle leaders work with and through their teams in order to achieve their school-wide and curriculum goals. The empirical data revealed that working with others in teams however, is not always easy. It can be complicated but it is also necessary to the middle leader's survival, especially as the middle leadership role has become more difficult and onerous. Therefore, the need to build and develop

effective teams is noticeably linked to distributing leadership and delegating tasks. Overall, distributing leadership and delegating tasks within a department was offered by participants as a way of dealing with the intensification of workload and subsequent pressures middle leaders face.

Professional development and support from subject-based programmes was evident but there were varied responses in terms of its usefulness. Again, time was seen as an issue associated with subject specific professional development. Although team work was seen as imperative for middle leaders to effectively do their job, no one commented on any professional development in this area. A conclusion can be drawn that there is a real need for middle leaders to be developed in people management as it is such an integral component of their role. Building teams takes time and communicating effectively and openly with others is a skill that needs to be developed which in turn creates trusting relationships and supportive interactions. This in turn creates a more collaborative, committed and trusting environment.

Finally, by having a trusting environment and trusting relationships many middle leaders felt supported by their colleagues in their teams and wider networks. However, not all middle leaders felt the collegial support that others shared. Some middle leaders are missing out on the expertise, support and collegial relationships that should exist in New Zealand secondary schools. A need for consistency and equity of collegial support is vital for middle leaders in order to be developed and cultivated in their middle leadership capacity.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

By employing a qualitative methodology and using three different groups of participants and two methods to gather data, I have minimised the weaknesses in the study, thereby enhancing the "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, in Bryman, 2008; p. 377) of the

results. Both reliability and validity have been strengthened through methodological triangulation. However, there are some limitations of the research which have included a number of factors. Initially, my aim was to use schools in a similar geographical area to my own but there was a reluctance to participate. I endeavoured to get a broader range of state schools to participate in the study, contacting 16 principals. It took approximately six weeks to gain four schools participation. Perhaps the external controls such as: Education Review Office (ERO) visits, the revised New Zealand Curriculum, and the new National Certificate Educational Achievement (NCEA) matrix impacted on this reluctance as principals wanted to shield their middle leaders from even more time pressures.

Of the four state secondary schools who participated, there were three single-sexed schools and one co-educational school. A strength of the study was that middle and senior leaders were willing to participate and express their views despite the time constraints they face. This allowed for two contrasting viewpoints to be accessed. By not approaching the private sector I have been unable to compare or contrast the state and private sector. Thus, the role and challenges of middle team leaders within this sector remains untapped. This is also true of other parts of New Zealand. A larger study comparing other schools throughout New Zealand could produce a different set of findings.

Another limitation was that teachers within department teams were not part of the study. Their voices are missing from the data and these voices would have been an interesting and informative perspective to look into, in order to gain a better understanding of how effective middle leaders are in coping with the challenges they face and also what teachers in department teams believe is the middle leader's role.

Due to time constraints, the detached way in which the open-ended questionnaire took place allowed for more flexibility for participants and I engaged more of a sample size than conducting one-on-one interviews. If there had been more time and participant school's more willing to allow for one-on-one interviews I would have conducted these in order to get even deeper data. A further limitation was that one of the questions asking about problems and issues of middle team leaders was not specific enough as several HOF answers conveyed information about student issues rather than department teams. In an interview situation I would have been able to clarify this question.

Finally, my own bias as a middle leader could have coloured my perception of the data but it is an area which I have tried to minimize. As Krueger and Casey (2000) point out, researchers need to "beware of personal bias and pre-existing opinions about the topic" (p. 140). I have tried not to jump to conclusions and have looked for evidence that disproves possible assumptions I may have had. By using quality questions in both the open-ended questionnaire and focus group methods and using a systematic, thorough method of analysis and triangulation of data I have minimised this threat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four main recommendations that need to be addressed at different levels; school level and the New Zealand Ministry of Education level, along with recommendations for further research to be investigated.

Principals and Middle Leaders of Secondary Schools

A need to cultivate and develop new and existing middle leaders must be considered by principals if they hope to retain quality teachers and sustain the leadership capacity in their schools. The research study and literature (Cranston, 2006; Fitzgerald et al., 2006; Naylor, Gkloai & Brundrett, 2010) generates this essential concern. One way to achieve this is through a formalised mentoring programme run internally by senior leaders and

experienced middle leaders in order to try and develop leadership capacity in their organisations.

Time was a negative, mitigating factor for middle leaders as they fulfil their role of middle leadership. Ideally, more time would be allocated to middle leaders in order to give them time to deal effectively with the paper work but also time to reflect on their practice in leading the department. Middle leaders want to spend more time on the leadership aspects of the job but the increasing pressure to complete administrative tasks is hindering this significant aspect to their changing role. Three middle leaders commented in the focus group sessions on how the professional discussion in the focus group was beneficial and they wished for more time to reflect in this way and deal with *professional concerns.*

Principals might consider identifying the professional development and supportive needs of middle leaders within their institutions and structure their own internal professional development and collegial support networks around these needs to provide consistency and equity of support. Working with other middle leaders and ensuring professional dialogue should be ongoing and is a necessary part of developing middle leaders.

New Zealand Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education (MOE) must consider promoting professional development for middle leaders especially in dealing with team work and working with people. Often middle leaders are thrust into this role without any real training and are expected to 'learn on the job' as Adey (2000) suggests. Teaching is a people-dominated role yet there is very little professional development available for middle leaders of teams suggests the research participants, other than building subject knowledge and keeping up with changes to the curriculum through national conferences, subject associations, cluster meetings and best practice workshops. In terms of dealing with people and

working in teams, middle leaders feel ill-prepared. It is time for the Ministry of Education to take some responsibility.

It would be beneficial for the Ministry of Education to consult middle leaders in order to develop a professional development model that integrates the professional development needs of middle leaders with links to mentoring within schools, university courses and external provider support and use it with selected schools. This model would be beneficial in promoting professional middle leadership of teams and help to build the capacity for leadership within a range of secondary schools. It would help to promote a better understanding and professionalism of middle leaders as they continue to grapple with the increasing demands of leading large department teams. At present the onus is on the individual to increase their own leadership capacity through university post graduate courses, as there are no provisions as yet, of a formal middle leadership professional development programme in New Zealand. Middle leaders in this study indicated that they are in fact ill-prepared to take on aspects of the role, especially in dealing with people management. This is a factor that needs to be addressed.

Recommendations for future study

- The role and challenges of middle team leaders within the private and integrated secondary school sector remains an area of further investigation. These could be compared to the state secondary sector to highlight any differences and/or similarities.

- There is a gap in the New Zealand literature base with regard to middle leadership and team work (Cardno, 1999). Another area worthy of further investigation is the teacher's perspectives in terms of how middle leaders build effective teams and how they see middle leaders dealing with the challenges of team work. An extended study, with an action research methodology of team

building and effectiveness would also be worthy of research in order to gather further information of best practice in managing and leading department teams.

- Looking into the effect of collegial support networks such as; senior leadership mentoring of middle leaders, by studying interactions and conversations between mentor and mentee could provide further insight into the mentoring professional development of middle leaders.

- Comparing Auckland based professional development for middle leaders with smaller city secondary schools in New Zealand to see if there is indeed a gap that needs to be addressed. School C in particular which was situated outside of Auckland expressed that what professional development there is, was limited, poorly delivered and often not up-to-date. This feeling was the consensus from the focus group and shows a real concern for the professional development of middle leaders.

Concluding Statement

In summary, this study adds to the current, sparse literature on middle leadership of teams in New Zealand secondary schools by investigating the role of middle leadership, the challenges they face in their current context and how they deal with these challenges. In order for middle leaders in New Zealand to effectively complete their role as leader and manger, the issues and needs outlined in this study should be considered by principals and the New Zealand Ministry of Education, to allow for the development of leadership capacity and the sustainability of middle leaders in New Zealand secondary institutions.

APPENDIX ONE

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Address Carrington Rd, Mt Albert, Private Bag 92025, Auckland, New Zealand

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

This open-ended questionnaire seeks to gain responses from members of the Senior Leadership team and Middle Leaders of Teams (HOFs) in your school. Please answer as fully as you can in the spaces provided.

1. How would you describe the role of the middle team leader (HOFs/HODs) in your school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What are the main expectations that the Senior Leadership team have of middle team leaders (HOFs/ HODs) in your school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. How are these expectations described above, communicated to the middle
    leaders (HOFs/HODs)?

    _____

    _____

    _____

4. Describe the professional relationship between Senior Leaders and middle
    leaders (HOFs/HODs) in your school.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

5. What are the main challenges that middle team leaders (HOFs/HODs) face in
    your school?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

6. What professional development support is given to middle team leaders as they
    grapple with the increasing challenges they face on a daily basis? Eg; introducing
    the revised curriculum, new NCEA matrix, staffing.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Issues and problems for middle team leaders when dealing with people in teams/departments are well-documented. So what are some of the issues/problems have you encountered?

_____

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_____

_____

8. How would you normally deal with these issues/problems?

_____

_____

_____

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_____

9. What would you consider the **MOST** important aspect of a middle team leader's role? **Why?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. In your view, what specific tasks do middle level team leaders in your school on the whole, perform well? Why do you think this is?

_____

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_____

11. Please add any other comments you would like to make about the role of the middle leader (HOFs/HODs) in your school.

_____

_____

_____

You have now completed the open-ended questionnaire.

Thank you for your time and response to this questionnaire.

APPENDIX TWO

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE

Opening Question:

Round Robin style:

- What is your name, department and one thing you enjoy about your role as a middle leader?

Introductory Questions:

- Outline what you see as your key responsibilities within your leadership role.

- What in your opinion are leadership and management? What distinguishes each one?

- How are each of these manifested in your role?

Transition Questions

- Describe your professional and personal relationships with members of your department/team.

- In your view, what does teamwork consist of?

- How would you go about building a team environment?

- Describe how you think your department operates eg responsibilities of members, how they relate to one another, dynamics of dept?

Key Questions:

- What are your expectations of your dept team and how do you communicate your expectations to members of your dept team?

- What do you see as the **MOST** important aspect of your job as a leader of a team?

- How do you go about doing what you consider to be the most important aspect of your job?

- What are some of the main challenges with your role as a middle leader of teams?

- How to you address these challenges?

- What support is given to you as you grapple with the current challenges facing middle team leaders?

Ending Question:

Of all the things that have been discussed today, which one is the most important to you? Try and use just ONE word.

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