THE POSITIONING OF SENIOR SCHOOL LEADERS WITHIN THE 'SELF-IMPROVING SCHOOL-LED SYSTEM' IN ENGLAND

by

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ABSTRACT

The state-funded school sector in England has been subject to a range of structural changes since 2010. These changes are often categorised as a move to create a 'self-improving school system' (SISS) with leaders in the school sector itself taking increasing responsibility for 'leading the system' and improving it from within. Such localisation of leadership might be seen, on the face of it, as an act of political decentralisation of education, replacing established local government mechanisms with aspects of governance, financial control, legal responsibility and leadership, handed to schools themselves. These changes have been accompanied by neoliberal phenomena including encouragement of greater competition, parental choice and market approach. Many leaders working in this context report that there is in fact a significant amount of pressure, expectation and power exerted by central government over schools and their leaders. Accountability mechanisms, and expectations of leaders that they will work with government in bringing additional schools into this new 'system', typify these pressures.

This research took two specific structural phenomena as its principal foci: the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) and the Teaching School Alliance (TSA). MATs reflect a key policy intention under the SISS, that schools directly funded by central government, rather than via local government authorities, should group themselves (or be grouped) into school-led 'local' groupings. Leaders of these schools are encouraged to collaborate within and across such groups and as a result need to act collaboratively but also competitively. TSAs (now reconfigured by government as Teaching School Hubs) act as collaboratively based training and development groupings and in my research all of the MATs had a typically well-established link to a TSA.

The sociological 'thinking tools' of Pierre Bourdieu were applied alongside Yrjö Engeström's third and fourth generation Activity Theory in a sythesised approach, examining how senior leaders were positioned within MATs and TSAs. Phenomenological approach used conversational interviewing of

21 senior leaders across seven MATs, each with a TSA attendant to it. Interviews took place between the summers of 2017 and 2019, meaning that post-2010 'systems' were embedding but that participants had professional memories of earlier approach. Interviews provided rich data enabling detailed experiences and reflections to be identified from participant narratives. Ten key themes emerged through a dualist structure-agency analytical frame and from these, five core findings were ultimately isolated through selective coding. The research concludes that hysteresis and misrecognition have been features of leader positioning within the developing SISS. It finds that values-led but contingent leadership approach is a pragmatically adopted solution for MAT and TSA leaders and that historicity is essential to leaders' sense-making and their career-story rationales, as they work to enact expansive transformation.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the agreement of my participants, in the Midlands and in the North West, to be interviewed. Every one of them said 'yes' immediately, and every one of them was generous with their time and with the openness and honesty of their responses.

To my wife, Karen, I simply say 'thank you'. She assisted skilfully with transcription, but her greater accomplishment is the good humour and support she has somehow maintained over several years as this thesis has slowly taken shape.

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LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

AB	Advisory Board (these replaced Headteacher Boards)
AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DfE	Department for Education
HTB	Headteacher Board (now replaced by Advisory Boards)
ITE/ITT	Initial Teacher Education / Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
LLE	Local Leaders in Education
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NCSL	National College for School Leadership (no longer in operation)
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership (no longer in operation)
NLE	National Leaders in Education
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner (now replaced by Regional Directors)
SCITT	School Centred Initial Teacher Training
SISS	Self-Improving School System
TSA	Teaching School Alliance (now replaced by Teaching School Hubs)
TSH	Teaching School Hub (these replaced Teaching School Alliances)

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the positioning of school leaders in state schools in England at a time when ideas about a 'self-improving school system' (SISS) were being progressively enacted. It examines leaders' experiences and perspectives during a two-year period between the summers of 2017 and 2019. By this time the Government in England was some way into establishing Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) as school sector structural solutions (DfE, 2010; 2016a; Academies Act, 2010) within an increasingly complex school sector landscape. MATs and TSAs had emerged in policy terms in relation to how the school sector was conceived, structured and led in England and this research is particularly concerned with them. I adopt ethnographic approach in explicating how senior leaders in schools were positioned within these environments, leading up to and during this period. The research explores how agency and structure interrelated during this period of school sector change and the psychosocial aspects (Ford, 2010) of leaders' own sense-making within their shifting contexts. It provides perspectives on and explanations of, leader positioning, of how leaders' positions relate to policy change and of sociological phenomena necessary in this.

My findings centre on the importance of historicity (Engeström, 2001) in revealing hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1996a, 2000), whereby leaders' past assumptions conflict with new required approaches, and misrecognition (Bourdieu 1977a), whereby they only half recognise compromises they need to adopt. Findings also foreground school leaders' apparent need to provide career-story sense-making rationales for their positioning, and they suggest leaders' adoption of values-led contingent leadership approaches, pragmatic, context informed and mindful of moral duty. These ideas are introduced in chapter 2 and the findings are detailed and discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The SISS is considered as an identifiable but problematically mutable and contestable social object. Indeed, a key assumption about the SISS being a coherent 'system' is a particularly challengeable idea (Courtney, 2015b; Keddie and Mills, 2019 – and see section 1.4, below) a problem which proves important in this study, with leaders' professional stories emphasising this conundrum. This study is about leaders and leadership, but most importantly it is about how leaders have experienced internal and external conflict as they found themselves positioned in changing professional environments. More than two decades of my own experience in working with school leaders has provided a perspective, but also an opportunity to access these leaders' experiences and their reflections on them.

The concept of a SISS was outlined in a seminal set of 'thinkpieces' by the Cambridge academic, David Hargreaves in 2010. His definition drew on ideas of school improvement, political decentralisation and school-to-school relationship: He argued:

> *'…that increased decentralisation provides an opportunity for a new vision of school improvement that capitalises on the gains made in school leadership and in partnerships between schools. It would usher in a new era in which the school system becomes the major agent of its own improvement and does so at a rate and to a depth that has hitherto been no more than an aspiration.'* Hargreaves (2010) p4

From 2010, policy narrative increasingly foregrounded school structural solutions whereby those leading and governing schools and groupings of schools received local agency from central government (DfE, 2010; Greany, 2014; Greany and Higham, 2018; Woods et al, 2020; Greany and Earley, 2022). Hargreaves' (2010) 'thinkpiece', *'Creating a self-improving school system'* and three related documents that followed (Hargreaves, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b) provided a rationale for shared school improvement practices within a decentralising context. Hargreaves saw increased school

leader agency as represented by a self-improving system 'architecture' consisting of four 'building block' processes:

- *capitalising on the benefits of clusters of schools*
- *adopting a local solutions approach*
- *stimulating co-construction between schools*
- *expanding the concept of system leadership*

From: Hargreaves (2010) p5

Via these 'building blocks' he therefore advocated an increasingly formalised multi-school grouped approach, a decentring from central and local government mechanisms and a formalisation of joined-up approaches within and across these groupings of schools. The concept of system leadership, whereby school leaders adopted broader responsibilities beyond their own school, was increasingly argued as particularly important by Hargreaves (2012b).

The term 'school-led' has also become prominent (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009; Greany, 2015; Greany and Higham 2018) as has 'system-led' (Hargreaves, 2007; Hatcher, 2008; Collarbone and Burnham-West, 2008; Hopkins, 2009; Cousin, 2019) and in 2022, the government further nuanced the term 'school-led' into 'trust-led'(DfE, 2022a), further emphasising policy primacy of MATs over individual schools. MATs are therefore one of the principal contexts and foci of this thesis as are TSAs, themselves more recently reconfigured into Teaching School Hubs (TSHs), and which focus particularly on school and workforce development. A concomitant recurring theme within this thesis is a that of changes at the 'middle-tier' (Muir, 2014; Simkins *et al*, 2015), the structural resolution between individual or small groups of schools and central government, as characterised by diminution of local government structures (Crawford *et al*, 2022) and arguably, the growth of academy trust management structures and large MATs themselves. My principal interest is how within and across these groupings and structural changes, school leaders are positioned and in how

'rights and duties', *'story-lines'* and resultant *'social acts'* (Harré *et al*, 2009, p7-8) manifest themselves in school leaders' real, lived experience.

1.1 Research purpose: focus, aims and research question

1.1.1 The research focus and aims

My thesis explores how those who lead within MATs and TSAs[1] respond to the implication that it is they and their institutions that are leading the broader system. I explore individual leaders' agency, or freedom to make and act on decisions and I explore the extent to which leaders and their organisations have autonomies consistent with an apparent decentralised system. I explore how school-to-school relationships enable and support these. Positioning theory (Harré, 2012), Bourdieu's thinking tools (1980, 1986, 2000), Activity Theory (Engeström and Sannino, 2021) and psychosocial analyses (Ford, 2010) help an exploration of agency as contextualised within leadership structures.

School leaders are positioned and position themselves as school system agents (Gronn and Lacey, 2004; Coldron *et al,* 2014) and such positioning is determined by agency-structure relationships (Giddens, 1984). This thesis examines school senior leader positioning as contextualised by and within a system that is proclaimed in the policy discourse as 'their system', at least in part devised, 'owned' and therefore led by them.

The thesis has as its context, grouped school-to-school settings that represent English governmental intention for continuing system reform. It concerns itself with aspects of the school-grouping landscape where, ostensibly, decentralising processes are a fundamental assumption and where

[1] Throughout most of the thesis I refer mainly to TSAs rather than TSHs, as at the time of data collection, a structural change to TSHs was only just beginning. Details of the change from TSAs to TSHs is discussed later in this thesis.

senior school leaders work together across multiple schools. To do this the research focused on academy trust groupings which had meaningful links with Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) at the time of the research. MATs provide an important context for this research as they have resulted from government policy and sectoral response to this policy (Gorard, 2009; DfE, 2010; Academies Commission, 2013; DfE, 2022b). That each MAT selected for the research worked in some way with a TSA meant that my research remained strongly focused on school improvement discourses as TSAs had this particular purpose (DfE, 2010; Gu *et al,* 2015).

Giddens' (1984) exploration of the dualist relationship between system structures and the agents interacting with them helps provide some of the approach I take in presenting and analysing my own findings later. Fundamentally my focus is on agents who by role and positioning are de facto structural components themselves and are positioned by a systemic offering and accepting of school, MAT or TSA-based roles essential to their organisations. I explore this positioning by interviewing those in the upper echelons of their organisations, including MAT Chief Executive Officers, MAT Executive Headteachers or Principals, TSA Directors and the Headteachers, Principals and Heads of School.

Via ethnographic conversational interviews, I aimed to reveal ways in which post-2010 changes in the arrangements for English education have resulted in or promised changed leadership experiences and how the apparent associated opportunities have manifested themselves. I critically analyse structural processes via which these experiences and opportunities have materialised for these leaders. I explore contradictions and paradoxes (Ainscow and West, 2006; Chapman, 2013; Greany and Earley, 2022) inherent within the SISS. Questions of positioning are explored, given the largely shared assumption that the English state system provides equitable entitlement to a good education for pupils, but where system-structural competition is encouraged between schools that comprises this. A further aim therefore was to explore how school leaders, many who see themselves as public

servants (Tomlinson, 1986; Ball, 2017), felt positioned within such a landscape, especially when government policy seemed to place school leaders themselves as part of the architecture of that system.

1.1.2 The research question

My research question is:

> *How do senior leaders in Multi Academy Trusts and associated Teaching School Alliances view their own position and agency within the developing 'self-improving school system' in England?*

This question identifies my research as being concerned with school leaders' agency and matters of their positioning (Davies and Harré, 1999; Harré, 2012; Warren and Moghaddam, 2018). The overall object of the research is the positioning of these leaders as contextualised by their own MATs and associated TSAs within the complexities of the SISS in England. My interest is in how MAT and TSA senior leaders are positioned by their context, circumstances, histories and own perspectives. My research question is further discussed in chapter 4.

Since the rise of the academy school a context has developed where many previously local authority (LA) (local government) maintained schools now operate within groupings of schools with distinct organisational, regulatory and funding differences between themselves and LA structures. A strong counter-phenomenon is that coincidental with this weakening of LAs, there has been an increase in centralised manipulation of the newly configured system with central accountability frameworks, high-stakes testing and inspection demand. Paradoxically, a concomitant, parallel increase in centralised control is observable. It is precisely this contradictory contextual environment and senior leaders' positioning within it, that my research explores.

The research question identifies MATs with associated TSAs because this relationship typified policy intentions at the time. The MAT represents the essence of a broader system redesign (Hopkins *et al,* 2014) with clear antecedents in earlier groupings such as federations (Chapman *et al,* 2010) and is often associated with a drive for heightened school grouping level responsibility, but with governmental monitoring and accountability structures (Hargreaves, 2011b). It can be argued that the academy project has become the 'answer' to a post-2010 governmental view that *'something must be done about all schools'* as opposed to an earlier mantra that *'something must be done about inner-city schools'* (Gunter and McGinity, 2014, p4). This said, my research explores school leader perspectives on the fragmentation and lack of coherence resulting from only partial uptake of academy status, variable by geography and phase and that many academies themselves are standalone: that is, not within MAT groupings.

MATs are intriguing when considering broader governmental policy rhetoric about freedom for schools, as staff and individual schools within a MAT:

> *'…can only do what the MAT allows them to do – indeed the situation is in some ways analogous to that for maintained schools prior to 1988 when the local authority had more control over the running of schools.'* West and Wolfe (2018) p17

This allows for my questioning of a seemingly problematic positioning of those who lead schools within trusts and those who lead the trusts themselves.

1.1.3 Rationale for this research

A key rationale for this study has been to access what school leaders felt about their positions, their positioning in relation to each other and in relation to the rights and duties (Harré *et al*, 2009; Harré, 2012) with which they associated themselves. Critiquing a perceived lack of progress on the English SISS, Hargreaves (2014) suggested a 'failure to elaborate the desdirata for a self-improving school

system' (p700) and echoed others writing at that period (Greany, 2014; Gunter and McGinity, 2014) suggesting that DfE education policy remained 'contradictory and incoherent' (p700) in detail. This arguable 'failure to elaborate' has made the voices of those positioned as leaders in and of the SISS of particular interest.

A second rationale was the need to theorise the positioning of senior school leaders within MATs and TSAs. I use Bourdieu's (1977a, 1980) 'thinking tools' and Engeström's third and fourth generation Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 1999; Roth and Lee, 2007; Nussbaumer, 2012; Vennebo, 2020), to support in the analysis and discussion of my findings, thus allowing a more abductive approach to my reasoning.

Thirdly, there was a rationale for exploring school leaders' positioning against contradictions that framed their professional lives. Such contradictions became apparent when leadership agency was explored in developing and interrelated structures such as MATs and TSAs (Greany, 2014; Greany and Higham, 2018; Earley and Greany, 2022). Certain of these contradictions were problematic enough to present themselves as deeper paradoxes and as the SISS further developed it seemed important to explicate their impacts on those directly affected by them.

A fourth rationale was to explore the specific experiences of school senior leaders and of those taking a role in system leadership (Hargreaves, 2007; Hatcher, 2008; Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009; Hopkins, 2009; Greany, 2017; Cousin, 2019; Cousin and Gu, 2022). The extent to which they saw themselves as part of a system leadership community and what the agentic and structural dynamics were, helped me to reach an understanding of how leadership manifests itself when framed by the intentions and structures of the academies and Teaching Schools projects. A varied range of MAT with TSAs, across contrasting geographies in two government regions, helped provide opportunity to explore leaders' experiences in differing contexts.

Finally, historical perspectives on school leaders' positioning in the years following the Academies Act (2010) and associated policy interventions (DfE, 2010; 2016b) that developed MATs and TSAs, provide important rationale. Those interviewed for this research had professional memories of schooling prior to and in the early stages of the development of the SISS. The SISS has been regarded by many as a political and ideological project and contention and controversy surrounding it means it may ultimately prove historically important in providing understandings of the present via analyses of the past.

1.2 The research context

Schooling in England is highly complex with a wide range of shifting influences and contributory sub-systems. Woodin refers to a *'fissiparous ecology of education'* (2012, p327) and the school system fragmentation and resultant lack of coherence that this reflects, contributes to a broader educational context that is certainly complex (Chapman, 2013; Courtney, 2015b; Reay, 2017; Keddie and Mills, 2019; DfE, 2020b). In England there is a universally available public education system but with the right to opt out into independent (private) or home schooling. There are statutory curricular requirements of schools and there is a National Curriculum, although there are parts of the sector including academies, that do not have to follow the National Curriculum. There are faith schools but with many children attending such schools simply because they are their nearest school (Allen and Vignoles, 2016). There are selective schools within some LAs, but this option does not exist in others.

Cultural contradictions exist between those arguing for choice and competition and those arguing for an effective, consistent, entitlement-based provision (Burgess *et al*, 2006; Greany and McGinity, 2021). There is an arguable assumption in England that comprehensive principles and entitlements dominate, but with many examples of how reality is far from this (Ball, 2017; NAO, 2018). This research is in part concerned with the gap that many would identify between such rhetoric and

reality. Important to the research is that English local authorities retained varied amounts of educational political power. Some worked directly with meaningful numbers of LA-maintained schools, particularly primary schools, whilst others had significant numbers of academies or free schools[2] affecting their ability to fully support their remaining maintained schools. The 'middle-tier' (Muir, 2014), traditionally structured around local authorities, is a particular focus for aspects of this research. Despite varied configurations of schools within their areas, LAs retained certain responsibilities, including school place planning, early years provision, home-to-school transport, alternative provision and Special Educational Needs and Disability support (Local Government Association, 2019), but there were disparities and variations in their relationships with schools in other ways (Simkins *et al,* 2015; Greany and Higham, 2018). Each of these phenomena contributed to an irregular, heterogeneous educational landscape despite a general view of education being a public good, comprehensively and equitably available (Exley and Ball, 2014; Gunter and McGinity, 2014; Hall and Gunter, 2015; Ball, 2017; Gorard, 2018; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019; Keddie and Mills 2019). Teachers working within the English state system had increasingly found themselves positioned, perhaps unwittingly, as working in schools that seemed part of a state provided, comprehensive, public-good endeavour but in fact were subject to competition, marketisation and commodification.

Central to the context for this research is the move to school-to-school collaborative approaches outside LA management mechanisms, and Hargreaves' (2010, 2011a, 2012b) vision was that schools should work in local groups to share and grow expertise and to support each other. Alliance building takes a significant investment in time and professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) and questions of affiliation, power dynamics, loyalty, risk and moral purpose come into play when a

[2] Now counted as academies in DfE data, free schools are also funded directly by government on a 'not-for-profit' basis and are set up by groups including charities, parents, universities, independent schools or businesses (New Schools Network, 2020).

leader engages in a collaboratively structured organisation. Just as this research is contextualised by the English school system's historical milieu it is also contextualised by present day sociological, geographical and organisational context. A significant body of work espouses and evidences the importance of schools developing partnerships to share good practice and to develop other schools (Ball and Junemann, 2012; Brighouse and Woods, 2013; Woods and Macfarlane, 2022). This research focuses on how senior leaders become positioned as such partnership structures become organically, locally, regionally or systemically more formalised.

System leadership (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009; Greany, 2017; Cousin and Gu, 2022) and broader systems theory (Senge, 1990; Kofman and Senge, 1995; Fullan, 2005; Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009; Hargreaves, 2010) are important to this research. English school leaders' positioning within the SISS is informed by a move since 2010 towards leading within, across and beyond one's own institution. The focus here is on leadership for a greater good and it is characterised by two regularly reiterated aspects within the discourse. Firstly, that proven senior leaders have a moral duty, purpose or imperative to bring their skills to impact not just on their own schools, but on others (Fullan, 2003; Currie and Lockett, 2007; Fullan, 2010; Hargreaves, 2014). Such considerations often reference long established work on ethical, moral and authentic leadership styles (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Bush and Glover, 2014). Secondly, that the system itself is in some way organically stronger if this is realised with integrity in a system-wide way. Such discourse often cites system-wide moral purpose as the key to equitability and social justice within education. An example of this was a speech to headteachers given by the then English Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove in June 2010, only a month after a Conservative-led coalition government had taken control from New Labour:

> *'…we can identify the common features of high-performing systems. The best people need to be recruited into the classroom. They then need to be liberated in schools set free from*

> *bureaucratic control. Given structures which encourage collaboration and the sharing of the benefits innovation brings. Held to account in an intelligent fashion so we can all identify the best practice we can draw on. And led in a way which encourages us all to hold fast to the moral purpose of making opportunity more equal.'* Gove (2010) n.p.

This research is therefore contextualised by school leaders' positioning within a discourse whereby a Secretary of State aligns striving to be a 'high-performing system' with 'liberation', freedom from bureaucracy, collaborative structures, the sharing of benefits from innovation and best practice, accountability, equality of opportunity and associated moral purpose. This is the context for examining the positioning of such a system's leaders.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 reviews an extensive literature on leadership typologies and approaches as relevant to this research and then provides a review of literature on theorisations of structure-agency environments. The theorisations explored in chapter 2 are accessed in my analysis later in the study.

Chapter 3 provides historical and thematic context for the research. It explores three periods between 1988 and the present, allowing consideration of changing policy environments and where the roots of current policy lie. It then takes four specific over-arching themes pertinent to this study and which provide context for key themes that emerge in my own discussion and analysis.

The study's design and methodology are detailed in chapter 4. The research is presented as methodologically interpretivist, as qualitative and utilising adbuctive reasoning. Research design, approach to participant selection, and analytical approach are all explained, as is my rationale for the adoption of semi-structured conversational interviewing as a method.

The research findings are presented and analysed in chapters 5 and 6. Giddens' (1984) dualist approach to the relationships between agency and structure informs the arrangement of these two chapters with chapter 5 taking agency as a starting point and chapter 6 using structures and their mutability as a way of focusing back on leader agency. Findings are presented via ten themes that emerged from analysis of interviewee transcripts, five in each of these two chapters.

Chapter 7 presents my overall core findings, a discussion of them and the conclusions of my research. This chapter considers the contribution of my research and potential future opportunities to build on it.

1.4 Some notes on terminology used

The terms 'agent', 'player', 'actor', agency' and 'autonomy' are variously used throughout and it is important to provide working definitions of how they are being conceptualised in this thesis. The first three are to a great degree interchangeable but reflect how the school leader as a social 'agent' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015; Burawoy, 2018), a person carrying degrees of freedom to determine their own actions, can sometimes be seen as knowingly or unknowingly responding to others' rules (or the 'rules of the game': thus 'player') and sometimes following a script or responding via actions to stimuli (thus: 'actor'). For school leaders, degrees of 'agency' describe the ability or restricted ability to act with these freedoms, and 'autonomy' is used to describe individuals' or organisations' freedoms to self-manage and make their own decisions, often though with increases in accountability expectations (Ball and Youdell, 2008; Neeleman, 2019). Frost (2006) suggests that in educational leadership, agency can be seen as *'capacity to make a difference'* (p20) and this research utilises Giddens' (1984) reminder of the dualist relationship between agency and structure and the ways that each constantly remakes the other. I discuss this dualist approach further in the literature review below.

The term ‘system’ is mainly used to describe overall national approaches to organising or structuring schools. It is contestable that what exists in England, because of its complexities and mutability (Courtney, 2015b; Keddie and Mills, 2019), can be straightforwardly described as one ‘system’. The term is also used in the contexts of activity systems, particularly in connection with Engeström’s Activity Theory, describing a definable grouping of organisations and actors, invested in a broader object, almost certainly involving co-working, collaborations and a set of agreed rules or approaches. The SISS itself is sometimes presented in policy terms as ‘the system’ (DfE, 2010; 2016b), or by many commentators (for example, by Courtney, 2015b; Ball, 2017) as a complicated component of an overall provision of schooling nationally – which itself might be considered as a wider, overall ‘system’. As such this term is recognised as problematic and subject to multiple meanings.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This review explores literature on conceptions of educational leadership and literature that theorises structure-agency environments. Initially it explores a substantive literature on typologies of educational leadership, evaluating differing conceptions and critiquing an arguable over-fixation on adjectival categories (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999; Crawford, 2019). It then examines writing on positioning theory, psychosocial approaches and sense-making before exploring the sociological tools of Bourdieu and Engeström. It provides the thesis with an underpinning critical survey of how educational leadership can be seen and understood as well as related research into 'what works' in school leadership. The exploration of sociological and psychosocial thinking tools and theorisations that follows in the second part of the review, are important in supporting the discussion and analysis later in the thesis.

2.1 Educational Leadership: typologies and approaches to 'what works'

A significant literature exists about educational leadership, how it manifests itself and what makes it effective. Such literature is pertinent as this study's research subjects are school leaders and as the psychosocial aspects of their sense-making are informed by the literature, research and discourse on educational leadership. Several studies provide typologies of educational leadership or expansions on and critiques of such typologies (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999; Bush and Glover, 2003; 2014; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008; 2020; Day, Sammons and Gorgen, 2020; Leithwood, Sun and Schumacker, 2020). Crawford (2019) discusses how managerial approaches to education developed into a growing emphasis on leadership, often based on conceptions of solo leadership but which ultimately led to a *'post-heroic'* (p58) suite of conceptualisations of shared leadership. Indeed, she points to Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach's (1999) reflection on a plethora of adjectives used for perspectives on shared leadership. Such

categorisations grew in number from the 1980s, ultimately settling on frequently re-emphasised ideas of distributed leadership.

Leadership 'types' as they have emerged in recent decades will have influenced this study's participants. I therefore use Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach's (1999) work here along with expansions and commentaries on it by Bush and Glover (2003; 2014) and subsequent reviews and analyses as relevant. Significant also, is Leithwood, Sun and Schumaker's (2020) expansion on the *'four paths model'* (p571) of school leadership for student learning. Its first test was reported by Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi in 2010 and this was expanded on by Leithwood, Sun and Pollock in 2017. Ultimately this section of the literature review concludes with a reflection on the endurance of typologies of educational leadership and that certain 'types' continue to persist – most notably, distributed, moral, transformational and contingent approaches and ideas of authentic leadership.

2.1.1 Instructional and transactional approaches, leader-follower relations and tendencies towards the transformational.

Instructional leadership involves leaders applying their energies specifically to teaching and learning (Sheppard, 1996; Southworth, 2002; Hallinger, 2003). It is often argued that it comes to the fore when particularly needed, an example being how curriculum and instruction became a focus for educational leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic (Shaked, 2022; Harris and Jones, 2021; Pollock, 2020). Hallinger (2005) also suggests that accountability-focused educational cultures tend to place focus on instructional leadership as accountability measures tend to centre on academic attainment. Southworth (2002) and Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001, p234) add that senior leaders and governors often develop *'shared instructional leadership'*, with teams of colleagues focusing their leadership energies on the instructional. They argue that those below executive leader level have increasingly returned to instructional approach because of what Hallinger (2005, p222) refers to as a *'global wave*

of principal preparation', exemplified in recent decades in the UK (Bolam, 2003) by the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) and associated government instigated NPQ programmes (Crawford and Earley, 2011). Hallinger argues that these often emphasise instructional or shared instructional approach. In 2005, he suggested that instructional leadership was *'a passing fancy that refuses to fade away'* (Hallinger, 2005, p221) but in a systematic review of research in 2020 he and collaborators (Hallinger, Gümüş and Bellibaş, 2020) demonstrated a significant and growing literature base worldwide emphasising instructional approach.

Instructional leadership can be associated with transactional approaches (Miller and Miller, 2001). This is because leaders focused on teaching and assessment practice, can tend to adopt transactional reward cultures in ensuring that teaching and assessment goals are met (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001). Transactional leadership is suggested by Miller (1998) as typically episodic, with exchange transactions of desired resource between executive leaders and those reporting to them happening as needed. This has relevance to ideas of 'gift exchange' as theorised by Bourdieu (1977a, 1980) and discussed below, whereby a leader's agency results from accepting symbolic benefits in return for adopting the gift-giver's leadership imperatives. Leaders interviewed in my study certainly evidenced transactional exchanges and Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) make a strong case that effective leaders engage in transactional exchanges as part of a broader transformational approach.

Transformational leadership has a relevance to Engeström's (1987, 1999) concept of expansive transformation, as expanded on later, and via which the organisation-transformational purposes of effective leadership are emphasised. Burns (1988, p26) describes transformational leadership as where *'leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality'* and Miller (1998, p32) suggests that it is therefore more *'potent and complex'* than transactional approach. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) and Leithwood and Sun (2012) suggest that effective leadership must ultimately have transformational purpose. As Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) remind us however,

transformation only takes place if both leaders and followers can work within the transactional relations of 'followership needing leadership' and vice versa (Crossman and Crossman, 2011; Gronn, 1996; Gronn and Lacey 2004). Transformations are argued therefore, to require transactions and transactions argued as pointless without transformational intent.

2.1.2 Moral and ethical leadership, democratic approach and the servant leader

Transformational effort is typically framed by a sense of vision or mission which itself is often underpinned by declarations of moral purpose. In 2003, Fullan identified an *'emerging image of the moral imperative of the principalship'* (2003, p41), using the term *'moral purpose'* (p30) in describing ideas of moral leadership. Before this, West-Burnham (1997) had suggested that moral leadership comprises a *'spiritual'* (p239) element with effective leaders needing a sense of belief in what they aim to achieve, as well as '*moral confidence'* (p241) whereby established, self-assured, ethical behaviour is consistently demonstrated. Ideas of moral leadership are therefore deeply established within leadership discourse, particularly in the public-sector education realm. Indeed, the idea of the servant leader (Greenleaf, 1977; Cerit, 2009) has a relationship to transactional and transformational leadership via ideas of the leader in someways also being a follower of those that they serve. Munby sees servant leadership as about *'leading with humility'* (2019, p107) and in educational contexts this might be relevant to leaders' colleagues, to students and their families and wider communities. However, in the UK at least, Gunter and Rayner (2007) and Gunter and Butt (2007) identified a move against ideas of headship within and for the public service, as the then Labour government 'remodelled' the workforce (DfES, 2003b; Hammersley-Fletcher and Adnet, 2009). Moral leadership can be more palatable to policy makers than servant leadership in times when competition is in the ascendency (Munby, 2019): leading with morals is publicly claimed by all, but education as service is ideologically challenged by some.

Higham (2022) explores how moral theories can contribute to ethical leadership. He frames ethical leadership as critical to a world population facing *'civilizational threats'* p257 such as those to the environment, democracy and the global economy. He argues that global sustainability is threatened by education system leaders' focus on *'short-term performance and competition'* p262. Thomson (2020) argues that ethical principles are at the centre of public roles such as school leadership but points out that values, morals and ethics are often ambiguously understood. Moral positioning may be something a leader might claim but the social and explicit nature of ethics requires a demonstrable code such as the Association for School and College Leader's *Ethical Leadership Framework* (ASCL, 2022) which details the *'personal characteristics or virtues'* (n.p) school leaders should exhibit as being: trust, wisdom, kindness, justice, service, courage and optimism, with 'service' therefore retaining prominence. The framework itself builds on the UK Government's seven 'Nolan principles' of public life (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995), specifically: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Thomson (2020) argues that corruption exists within the English education system which if accepted, is likely to directly conflict with ASCL's first principle, that: *'school and college leaders should act solely in the interest of children and young people'* (2022, n.p).

Higham (2022) argues that ethical leadership can require what West-Burnham (2009) calls democratic leadership. Higham suggests that carefully configured, democratic leadership in schools may be capable of overcoming what Grint (2010) refers to as *'wicked problems'* (p170) whereby competing leadership challenges or perspectives conflict with each other. Via democratic problem resolution, West-Burnham argues that school leaders can collectively overcome such problems via sacrificing of power to a broader base. Such democratic ideas arguably build on what Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) identified as participative leadership and the closely related and often cited idea of distributed leadership (Neuman and Simmons, 2000).

2.1.3 Solo, hero and turnaround leadership – towards shared approach

Participative and distributed leadership, emerged in response to and in some ways alongside, what Crawford (2012; 2019) has called solo leadership. Manifestations of solo leadership are many but tend to base themselves on a simple managerial tenet that: *'…if only the right person can be found, all will be well'* (Crawford, 2012, p610; Conger, 1989). Solo leadership can manifest itself in ideas of the charismatic leader (Crawford, 2002; Conger, 1989) and most famously in the form of the heroic leader, leading from the front and attracting the limelight. Apex leaders (Hunt, Baliga and Peterson, 1988; Bush, 2020) have in the past, undertaken top-down 'school-rescues' positioning themselves or being positioned by others as 'super-heads' driving change from above (Araújo, 2009; Hutchings *et al,* 2012). Solo leadership can also manifest itself as turnaround leadership (Bush, 2020; Liu, 2020). Liu (2020) nuances this idea, drawing on Murphy's earlier (2009) work. He suggests that to be effective, turnaround leadership must be:

> *'…opportunity-oriented, proactive and intentional, committed and enduring, resilient, optimistic/positive, enthusiastic/passionate, confident, decisive, and dedicated'.* (Liu, 2020, p18).

However, he also emphasises that successful turnaround leaders focus on interpersonal dimensions of their leadership (Liu, 2020; Martin and Samels, 2009), returning us to a repeating theme that senior leadership can require both individual ultimate ownership of responsibility as well as the skill of leading an effective, participating and invested team. Crawford's (2012) review of solo and distributed leadership discourse suggests a need for a hybrid reality (Gronn, 2009) whereby aspects of both solo and distributed leadership combine in leader identity-making and the realisation of effective change.

2.1.4 Shared approach – participative and distributed leadership

Participative leadership is seen as more democratic in approach, drawing on West-Burnham's (2009) principles, while distributed leadership can manifest itself in a more hierarchically top-down approach (Harris, 2013; Bolden, 2011; Bush and Glover, 2003; Hatcher, 2005). Distributed leadership has been critiqued for sometimes manifesting as a managerial approach (Fitzgerald and Gunter 2006) and if poorly enacted, can simply transfer work away from senior responsibility holders (Gunter, 2012). Hall, Gunter and Bragg (2011) go further by evidencing how distributed leadership can provide a rhetorical, discursive smokescreen for a policy-driven regime of instrumental or performative leadership. Woods and Roberts (2018) argue that distributed leadership can ignore important themes including social justice, power and inequality. Woods *et al* (2004), in a review of literature on distributed leadership, pointed to how autonomy and control within an organisation are affected by local cultural values and organisational mutability but are also impacted by broader influences, for example, from government. They point to sometimes ambiguous or unclear conceptualisations of distributed leadership which can result in school leaders themselves over-simplifying what it takes to enact it effectively. This was corroborated in a further systematic review by Tian, Risku and Collin (2016). Leadership actions can become diminished and diluted if they are not carefully configured and managed regarding workload impact (Hartley 2010; Harris 2013). As discussed later and as relevant to my findings, Bourdieu's (2000) ideas of symbolic violence and gift exchange (Burawoy, 2018) are relevant to how leadership actions and tasks can be seen as providing a collegial leadership approach while in fact shifting problems 'downwards' via a power gradient. Crawford (2019) raises concerns over intellectual rigour about how distributed approaches work and Simkins (2005) argues that distributed leadership must be contextualised by environments of broader collaboration within and beyond schools and based on informal in-school relations rather

than more formal power structures. Distributed leadership remains a 'go-to' approach that seemingly supplies leaders with both managerial solutions and an attractive collegial cultural.

2.1.5 Postmodern and contingent leadership

Aspects of what Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) and Bush and Glover (2003) referred to as postmodern leadership are particularly relevant to my research. This is the case because 'wicked problems' (Grint, 2010) and processes such as Engeström and Sannino's '*knotworking'* (2021, p13), whereby complex and dynamically mutating groups work and rework problems in the real world, are evidenced as MATs and TSAs engage in expansive transformations. Discussing Taubman's (2009) exploration of postmodern educational context, Bell (2019) explains that in such organisations learning is *'…at best extraordinarily complex, tumultuous and both esoteric and maddening'* (p107). Such a leadership environment contrasts with those where more linear, control-based and externally imposed accountability systems operate (Ozga and Lawn, 2017; Evans, 2011). Formal or managerial leadership environments (Bush, 2019; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005) are argued as possible where there is such stability (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999) and as Glatter (1999) reminds us, leadership inevitably involves managerial activity. Robinson (2010; 2019) suggests however, that three leader capabilities underpin successful schools: *'…using relevant knowledge to make leadership decisions; solving complex problems; and building relational trust'* (2019, p79). A postmodern explanation – but for many, also a conundrum arguably exemplified by my study – sees leaders exercising these capabilities within their complex organisations but with complicated problems resulting from a wider, governmentally elicited, accountability rich educational landscape (Bell, 2019).

As Crawford (2019) suggests, while leadership typological categories can be helpful, the frustration is that merit or relevance can be found in adopting or applying any of them, as appropriate. As Bush puts it, they are all *'partial'* (2019, p13). Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) themselves emphasised the critical importance of context and that differing: *'…contexts require different*

leadership responses' (p15). In response to these postmodern challenges, contingent leadership has emerged as a pragmatic and reflexive model. Here a leader will draw on 'what works' once they have assessed a situation and may well utilise several aspects of leadership approach in a realistic, bespoke response to *'positive and negative influences of school contexts'* (Gu and Johansson, 2013, p303). Recognition of the importance of *'structural prerequisites'* (Warwas, 2015, p311) when conceptualising leadership, is particularly relevant to my research, given the complex, variable structural and agentic contexts it explores.

2.1.6 Values-based contingency and authentic leadership

Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) argue for *'values-based contingency leadership'* (p52) whereby what Warwas calls *'motivated agency'* (2015, p311) is interweaved with structural context in challenging leaders to apply elements of leadership typological categories as appropriate, but to do so mindful of an overarching values approach. Higham's (2022) arguments for ethical leadership requiring adoption of societal codes in schooling would support such an argument.

Values-underpinned contingent leadership has strong conceptual similarities with authentic leadership (Terry, 1993; Bhindi and Duignan, 1997; Begley, 2001; George, 2003; Gardiner *et al*, 2014). In reviewing the literature on authentic leadership, Ahmed (2023) identifies a range of discontinuities in how it is conceptualised and identifiable in praxis, but Woods' (2007) three-dimensional conceptualisation based on personal, ideal and social authenticities, provides a commonly identifiable set of parameters. The 'personal' emphasises being true to oneself, the 'ideal' emphasises ethical and professional grounding and the 'social' a commitment to needs and expectations of the school and its wider community. As Wilson (2014) puts it, authentic leaders:

> *'…act in accordance with their personal values and convictions, earning respect, trust and credibility for being genuine and true to their beliefs.'* (p484)

Despite a longstanding sectoral attraction to ideas of authentic leadership, it is the more nuanced and pragmatic idea of values-led contingent leadership that I find particularly relevant in my findings later.

2.1.7 'What works', student success focused models and methodological debate

Robinson's (2010; 2019) leader capabilities, based on knowledge for decision making, complex problem resolution and building relational trust and Woods' (2007) personal, ideal and social authenticity model are useful in returning this discussion to Leithwood, Sun and Schumaker's (2020) 'four paths' model. Out of some concern by Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) about the adjectival or '*menu*' (p6) approach to leadership and out of the observation that definitions of educational leadership often fail to identify what leaders 'do', Leithwood, Sun and Schumaker (2020) designed a testable model of school leader influence. Their conception is based on four 'paths' along which school leaders 'travel' in order to 'reach' students (Leithwood, Sun and Pollock, 2017) and has been the focus of the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP), active since 2001 (Gurr, 2017). These paths are the rational, emotional, organisational and family paths. Each path contains variables that impact a leader's effectiveness in realising potential student success.

Leithwood, Sun and Schumaker's (2020) rational path includes the knowledge and skills that the organisation's teachers and leaders have about curriculum and teaching and learning, arguably returning us to aspects of the discussion of instructional leadership above (Southworth, 2002; Hallinger, Gümüş and Bellibaş, 2020). Their emotional path contains variables concerned with individual and collective staff member dispositions and emotional states. Variables on the organisational path are concerned with how members of the organisation are structured in their relations with each other, including via organisational culture, operating procedures and policies. Family path variables are those determined by the organisation's relationship with students, their families and the community and these groups' general orientation to education more generally.

Alluding to the ISSPP, Eacott and Riveros (2021) refer to its use of large-scale approaches to case study. They suggest that educational leadership research into 'what works' tends to revert to case study because of its ability to account for participant voice. They suggest that the ISSPP has methodologically sought legitimacy via analytic approach *'…by appealing to the standards (e.g. external validity) of quantitative research'* (p175) despite its case study basis. This hint at the paradigm war (Hammersley, 1992) of qualitative and quantitative approaches and at the need for legitimacy is arguably well-illustrated by the four paths model. However, as Møller and Rönnberg (2021) have demonstrated in their extraction of Swedish and Norwegian cases from the ISSPP's data, the model has had success in isolating actions that successful school principals exhibit.

In the Sweden and Norway case above, Møller and Rönnberg (2021) identify how leader engagement with ISSPP path variables has tended to emphasise democratic approaches, trust and an ethic of care as well as claims by principals of distributed approach. They also emphasise a growing managerial and administrative aspect to leadership in Scandinavia amid a growing culture of accountability. Their analysis emphasises that in these countries, leadership is a *'…context-sensitive, moral and political enterprise.'* (p113). Their and Møller's (2017) work brings us back to the ideas of contingent leadership (Gu and Johansson, 2013; Warwas, 2015; Higham, 2022) discussed earlier as well as democratic, moral, ethical and transformational approaches. It would seem that despite Leithwood's and his collaborators' intentions for the ISSPP to emphasise 'what works' and a widespread uptake of the ISSPP's findings across the sector, it remains the case that there tends to be reversion to the menus that Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999), Bush and Glover (2003; 2014) and Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008; 2020) have discussed at such length. Classifications sometimes based more on rhetorical adjectival phrases that describe what leaders think they are doing persist, perhaps because educational leadership research tends to employ underlying generative principles (Møller and Rönnberg, 2021). Ever shifting policy and structures arguably result in ever shifting educational leadership typological explanations.

2.1.8 System leadership

Finally in this section and specifically relevant to this research, the existence of senior leaders working within and across grouped activity systems has consolidated as a fundamental but contestable feature of the SISS. Cousin and Gu (2022) describe 'system leadership' as a term with *'considerable conceptual elasticity'* (p185) and as Greany and Higham remind us, there are challenges and contradictions for those holding such roles:

> *'…to differing degrees, they are charged with working on behalf of an idealized 'self-improving' system, engaging their peers in building collaborative alliances and 'deep partnerships', even while operating in a competitive marketplace for school improvement services.'* (2018) p49

Indeed, as already identified, the use of the word 'system' is itself contestable when used to describe the organisation of schooling in England (Courtney, 2015b; Keddie and Mills, 2019). Adopting a historical perspective from the mid nineteenth century to the present, Ball is unambiguous, describing England's school landscape as *'…a rickety, divided, unstable, and often ineffective, but nonetheless overbearing, educational apparatus'* (2018, p208). Courtney (2015b) is clear that recent government-contrived groupings of schools:

> *'…represent an expression of late capitalism in the provision of schooling, whereby new, corporatised networks structure away 'bureaucracy' and de-systematise whatever remains of the system.'* (p815)

Fullan (2004) saw such system agents as leaders who work beyond their own schools in supporting a wider system. Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) emphasise system leadership as involving leaders who can show *'how self-managed schools, emerging from an era of competition, might work together for greater social equity'* (p12). Greany and Earley (2017) are clear that system leaders are

working in a context where both collaboration and competition have to somehow, coexist. In 2012 Hargreaves suggested that system leadership can itself become distributed *'so that everyone in a partnership shares the values and practices of the original system leaders'* (2012b, p16). He couches this by way of *'collective moral purpose'* (p17) and builds on established definitions of distributed leadership (Harris *et al,* 2007; Harris and Spillane, 2008; Day *et al,* 2010; Crawford, 2012; Harris, 2013; Woods and Roberts, 2018). Hargreaves draws on a range of work to explore system leadership (Senge, 1990; Fullan, 2005; Hopkins and Higham, 2007; Hopkins 2007; Higham, Hopkins and Matthews*,* 2009), not least his own earlier work (Hargreaves, 2007). Senge's (1990) identification of five 'component technologies' or 'disciplines' (p69) within learning organisations aimed at theorising how leaders work within complex organisational structures. His disciplines, '*systems thinking*', '*personal mastery*', '*mental models*', '*building shared vision*' and '*team learning*' (p6-10) and his further consideration of them within school contexts (2000) are pertinent to developments in the educational landscape in England and provide an aspect of provenance for Hargreaves' 'thinkpieces'. In the English context, Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) saw system leadership as: *'…having the expertise, credibility and capacity to lead learner-centred (local) system change while sustaining one's own school'* (p135) with this identification of the 'local' context continuing as a feature in Hargreaves' explanations.

Hopkins (2007) categorised system leaders as being those, like National Leaders in Education (NLEs) (DfE and NCTL, 2018), that Greany (2017) later categorised as 'designation' based. Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) discussed how leaders might move beyond their own schools in a more structural or constructive way with a network-led school grouping benefiting in becoming *'greater than the sum of its parts'* (Armstrong, Brown and Chapman, 2021, p323) or subject to *'expansive transformation'* (Engeström, 2001, p137). However, Gunter (2012) cautioned that this could impact on existing leaders in the system leader's own school via distributed leadership mechanisms.

Problematically, there remains some sector-wide disagreement over the precise definition of 'system leader'. In 2008, Hatcher categorised them as a *'new top-level management cadre'* (p25), emphasising their role as facilitating effective orientation of school groupings to government policy. There are a number of overlapping levels of role that they might inhabit, including those where a largely school-based leader works beyond their school but within their own school grouping (Middlewood, Abbott and Robinson, 2018), to where a leader's key role is to manage several schools and perhaps also work beyond this grouping (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009; Robinson, 2012) to roles that are area, region or nationally based, but concentrated on wider 'grouped' system approach (Cousin and Gu, 2022).

2.1.9 Typologies and 'what works' – some conclusions

This survey of selected 'types' of leadership commonly occurring in the literature supports analysis later in the thesis, largely because participants in this research have to a degree been influenced by discourses associated with the types discussed. Organisation of school leader development has been the focus for a number of studies (Crawford and Cowie, 2011; Bush, 2013; Simkins, 2012; Cliffe, Fuller and Moorosi, 2018, Munby, 2019) that have reviewed differing iterations of NPQ leadership programmes and other or broader approaches to leader education. The typologies detailed by Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach's (1999) and Bush and Glover (2003; 2014) have endured in informing discourses not least because of waxing and waning emphasis on them in these leadership programmes. With the move to emphases on shared leadership, as detailed by Crawford (2019), frequent references to distributed leadership endure as does the cross-cutting and appealing idea of moral leadership. Interest in contingent and transformational approaches and ultimately in what effective system leadership might be also persist (Bush, 2019; Cousin and Gu, 2022). This review now turns to examination of a selection of theorisations important in considering how leaders, however they see their leadership styles, are positioned.

2.2 Theorisation of structure-agency environments

Having considered literature on discursive explanations of educational leadership, the review now turns to literature on sociological and psychosocial theorisations pertinent to the educational leadership domain. The intent of this section is to underpin the research approach taken and to ensure phenomena that emerge in the findings are theorised. In this chapter, I explore a selection of sociological or psychosocial ideas relevant to the overall purpose of the thesis. The chapter reflects that the experience or process of collecting my data and undertaking the research itself has been as important as the data that emerge. The analysis draws on the data that emerged but also on the discursive, narrative, conversational experiences of participants and researcher during the process of the research.

I start by exploring positioning theory. I then consider the relationships of psychological and sociological approach by considering literature on psychosocial enquiry and I also explore the literature on agentic sense-making. This leads to sections on Bourdieu's thinking tools and to Activity Theory with reviews of these two areas of theorisation. Bourdieu's thinking tools are important in my analysis, particularly in relations to ideas of agency. Engeström's third and fourth generation Activity Theory help in theorizing aspects of structure. The dualist approach to agency structure advanced by Anthony Giddens (1984) and adopted in this thesis, leads to a final consideration of the benefits of using Bourdieu's ideas and Activity Theory in concert.

Agency in educational leadership is seen by Gronn (2000) as operating most effectively when via a shared culture and approach within organisations. Giddens' (1984) dualist approach to the agency-structure relationship sees social structures as subject to constant recreation via agentic action based on knowledgeability and reflexivity. Bandura (1989) observes that agency includes a self-belief in efficacy and a key capacity to self-regulate, chiming with Giddens' sociological perspective. Giddens'

dualist explanations prove important as this thesis develops and provide a structure for my findings and discussion chapters later.

2.2.1 Positioning theory, psychosocial approach and sense-making

Concerned with the cognitive psychology of social action, positioning theory provides an approach to revealing *'explicit and implicit patterns'* of reasoning as shown in the ways agents act towards others (Harré *et al,* 2009, p5). I access it for its reminder that agents act not just in response to social stimuli but also according to their own beliefs and practices. School leaders, just as other social agents do, develop perceptions of their and others' *'rights and duties'* (p6) and the meanings discernible in their own actions and the actions of those they come across. Applied in a range of contexts (Davies and Harré, 1990, 1999; Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Harré *et al*, 2009; Moghaddam & Harré, 2010; Harré, 2012; Warren and Moghaddam, 2018) from local systems to national governments, positioning theory is useful in the way it can be related to ideas of narratology (Harré *et al*, 2009; Harré, 2012; Tourish, 2014). Such narratological analysis can reveal how a developing *'story-line'* (Davies and Harré, 1990, p46; Harré *et al*, 2009, p6) is subject to constraints and is expressed via a language of locally relevant patterns of rights and duties. Davies and Harré (1990) argue that social actors are subject to *'multiplicities of 'self''* (p47) and act according to their internal influences perhaps as much as they respond to the external stimuli of others. Educational leaders are internally influenced in such ways as well as by colleagues, schools, trusts, alliances and ultimately by Government. Work by Struyve *et al* (2018), for example, explores the positioning of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in schools and draws significantly on Davies and Harré (1990) and Harré *et al* (2009). Struyve *et al* take the term 'positioning' as signifying dynamic processes of *'…positioning the self and the other while simultaneously being positioned by this other person'* (p704) and they consider positioning theory as

having helped them *'open the black box of the negotiation processes'* (p715) between school leaders and SENCOs in their case study schools.

There are critiques of positioning theory. Deppermann (2013) for example, suggests that Harré's and colleagues' use of positioning theory had tended to underuse real, naturalistic professional talk as its research context, although a cross-disciplinary review by McVee points to over 130 studies in the educational field where this has been the case (McVee *et al*, 2021). For my research the offer from positioning theory is how professional people use discursive interactions to construct their own views of how they are positioned and that these relationships are codified through language.

Hollway (1996) conceptualised 'position' in part, as how a person uses discourses available to them in making sense of their experiences. For educational leaders such discourses include the adjectival taxonomies and typologies discussed in section 2.1 above. Holloway also accesses psychosocial approach in her work, for example on crime and on subjects' discursively determined perceptions of crime (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Psychosocial approach is generally used by applied clinicians with psychology expertise as a way of understanding the relationships between the psychological and the social context. Ford (2010) has applied it to leaders in UK local government contexts however, meaning it might also be a relevant lens to apply to educational leadership. Ford adopts Hollway's work on understanding anxieties and emotions, whereby the self is created through subconscious defences against anxieties (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Ford claims that such approaches are under-explored when compared for example, with a significant canon of work on roles within employment fields – and as she puts it *'…almost all managers are also subordinates and thus have a hierarchy above themselves as well as below'* (p50). Using poststructuralist, feminist approach, Ford suggests that educational leaders working in post-heroic, shared leadership contexts as discussed above by Crawford (2019), can find their roles more *'difficult… to live up to'* (Ford, 2010, p59) with anxiety, projection and introjection evidenced. She argues that leaders:

'…adopted the language of dominant discourses of leadership, but their actions were obscured by paradoxical and perhaps unintended consequences and outcomes.' (2010, p62)

Ford concludes that Psychosocial exploration of leaders' narratives provides useful ways of taking greater account of their context, individual experiences and surrounding hegemonic, culturally affected discourses and how these combine in their sense-making.

Sense-making is suggested by Maitlis and Christianson (2014) as being an ongoing process via which understanding is sought of issues and events that might be new, ambiguous, opaque or that might challenge existing understandings. Weick (1995) had earlier described it as a sequential process involving identification of a new or different event, attempts to explain or interpret such developments and then articulation, moving others towards understanding and appropriate actions. Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2016) see it as dynamic and involving *'constructing meaning from present stimuli, mediated by prior knowledge, experiences, beliefs and values'* (p684) as framed by the social context. Applying ideas to educational leadership, they adopt the idea of sense-making in exploring how leaders arrive at outcomes by framing their circumstances within their own mental models. They suggest that sense-making is triggered by ambiguous challenges and threats to leaders' identities and therefore is ultimately about attempts to *'regain control'* (p684) in response to threat. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) and Ford's (2010) approaches to understanding the role of anxiety in leader positioning therefore usefully connect to ideas of sense-making.

Positioning theory, psychosocial approach and ideas of sense-making provide important conceptual contexts for my research's exploration of school leaders within the SISS. Change, interpretation and resultant reconsiderations of professional identity are relevant in school leaders' narratives as they consider their relationships to MATs, TSAs and the wider SISS.

2.2.2 Bourdieu's thinking tools

Pierre Bourdieu provides perspectives for examining school leaders and their behaviour within their social worlds. His ideas of 'doxa', 'field', 'game', 'capital', 'habitus', 'hysteresis', 'misrecognition' and 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1979a, 1980, 1989, 1990, 1991b; 1996a; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) all provide a perspective on participants' agency and behaviours as well as those of the organisations within which they work and associate. Bourdieu suggests we are part of our own unspoken worlds but also bounded within these worlds (Bourdieu, 1979a; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

*2.2.2.1 **Field theory, habitus and hysteresis***

Social actors are positioned in a game-like context (Bourdieu, 1979a), acting within multiple, overlapping fields, sometimes difficult to identify but definable by the 'games' that determine them. School leaders act within obviously visible fields such as the school, MAT or TSA and within informal local or online groupings (Carpenter *et al*, 2022). However, educational fields are not always so explicable and can be opaque (Lingard and Christie, 2003; Apple, 2004, 2006, 2013; Mills, 2008; Ferrare and Apple, 2015).

'Field theory' across social domains has been explored by numerous theorists (Lewin, 1951; Mey, 1972; Martin, 2003; Martin and Gregg, 2015) with Bourdieu (1979a) seeing it as a social topology based on various divisions of a person's enacted world, arranged via the forms of capital held. Martin and Gregg suggest that Bourdieu saw any field as both *'…a field of forces and a field of struggle that has game-like aspects to it.'* (2015, p48). In educational analysis Bourdieu tended to consider field at the macro-level such as in his work on French elite schools (Bourdieu, 1996b). Although he avoided applying field at the local educational level (Ferrare and Apple, 2015), his

approach to field theory is directly applicable to the realm of educational leadership (Gunter, 2016; Bathmaker, 2015; Lingard and Christie, 2003).

As important is Bourdieu's idea of 'habitus'. The use of habitus in educational research has been critiqued (Tooley and Darby, 1998) but has an enduring 'fit' with ideas of the educational social world (Reay, 1995; Nash, 1999). Bourdieu saw habitus as *'…a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices'* (Bourdieu, 1979b, pvii), encapsulating unthinking, subconscious 'habits' with these combining to represent and inform a person's actions. Habitus can be seen as the embodiment of the cultural capital that social actors utilise in varying ways (Bourdieu, 1977a, 2000) allowing an individual to act generatively rather than just reproductively. Therefore, school leaders for example, bring their cultural and social backgrounds, histories and experiences and feel connected to, or 'right' in, certain contexts. Critical to Bourdieu's explanation however, is that habitus defines our 'normal' and as such can be invisible to us. Critics such as Jenkins (2002) and Kenway and MacLeod (2004) suggest that Bourdieu is ultimately unconvincing and that many make too simplistic a reading (Reay, 2004), however, Mills' position that *'…habitus shapes but does not determine our life choices'* (2008, p82) and Harker and May's (1993) view that social agents' practices *'…orient rather than strictly determine action'* (p174), remain typical of widely adopted views on the usefulness of habitus.

Of relevance to the structure-agency dualist approach (Giddens, 1984), adopted in my analysis in chapters 5 and 6, is Bourdieu's (1996a; 2000) interpretation of hysteresis. In the social world, Bourdieu suggests that a social actor's habitus may become *'disrupted and dislocated'* (Graham, 2020, p450) in relation to altered field (Hardy, 2008):

> *'…in particular, when a field undergoes a major crisis and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed'.* Bourdieu (2000) p160.

The introduction of the SISS, or the lived reality of how its introduction has been experienced by English school leaders might be argued to have had some disruptive resonance with a sense of crisis. Courtney (2017) for example, suggests that hysteresis has been a knowing approach of Government as it has sought to destabilise established welfarist leadership models. Bourdieu's proposition is that mismatching (Graham, 2020; Strand and Lizardo, 2017) of established habitus to changed fields in effect results in actors' needing to somehow manipulate themselves an altered personal habitus (Bourdieu, 2000) to fit their new field.

2.2.2.2 Game-playing and forms of capital

Reflecting their habitus, agents inhabit their fields of activity in a game-like way (Bourdieu, 1980; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Warde, 2004; Bathmaker, 2015; Burawoy, 2018) with players, rules to be learned, competition, winners and losers. Burawoy (2018) suggests that such game playing involves often manipulative gift exchange and that this is critical to ideas of domination, strength and weakness. School systems are competitive environments in which advancement is subject to often unspoken or opaque rules. School leaders will collaborate, build teams and react to changing rules, bringing available capitals to play within agreed but often differently envisioned fields (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1985).

If habitus encapsulates the dispositions of the individual and field provides social domains, then Bourdieu's (1977a, 1986) forms of capital describe *'what is at stake'* (James, 2011, n.p.), what can be deployed or acted upon. Economic capital is what players have unequally available to them in material terms, particularly relevant in marketised education systems. Cultural capital refers to an agent's gathering of culturally imbued or symbolic elements like skills, knowledge, tastes, belongings and credentials, acquired through being part of a culturally connected group or class. Agents hold embodied dispositions toward various cultural goods and practices (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1979a, 1986; Lingard and Christie, 2003). Social capital is a resource acquired through the possession of *'…more or*

less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p119). It is acquired via social standing, connections and positioning and realised within social networks and relationships (Lingard and Christie, 2003). Like all capital accrual, it is unequally available and importantly, Bourdieu sees social capital as found in the individual based on their own investment and effort unlike cultural capital which is held collectively. Social capital is therefore measured by the sum of the *'size of the network of connections'* and the volume of economic, cultural and social capital held (Bourdieu, 1979a) and is deeply relevant to the complex landscape of educational leadership.

2.2.2.3 ***Symbolic capital, gift-exchange, symbolic violence and misrecognition***

According to Bourdieu capital manifests itself in an important fourth way, a form particularly relevant to this research. Symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1980, 1991a, 2000), is produced by *'…the transfiguration of a power relation into a sense relation…'* and in so doing *'…symbolic capital rescues agents from insignificance, the absence of importance and of meaning'* (Bourdieu, 2000, p242). All forms of capital support domination of agents over each other, but symbolic capital is the overt demonstration of this.

Gunter (2004) emphasises the importance of symbolic capital in educational fields including leadership (Gunter, 2001, 2004, 2012; McGinity and Gunter, 2016). The SISS can be argued to foreground leaders' tendencies to seek *'glory, honour, credit, reputation, fame'* (Bourdieu, 2000, p166) rewarding them with followership (Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985; Hollander, 1995; Shamir *et al,* 2007; Riggio *et al*, 2008; Jackson and Parry, 2011; Schedlitzki and Edwards, 2018). Social media can be argued to provide educational leaders with a leader-follower symbolic capital rich environment (Gilani *et al,* 2019; Richardson *et al,* 2019).

For Bourdieu (2000) fields are symbolic violence arenas where symbolic capital is deployed. Marxist ideas of false consciousness (Beasley-Murray, 2000) parallel those of symbolic violence whereby the arbitrariness of a social order is normalised or manipulatively ignored to legitimate existing social structures or dominances (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Symbolic violence also relates to gift giving and exchange, referred to by Bourdieu as *'…a collective hypocrisy in and through which society pays homage to its dream of virtues and disinterestedness...'* (Bourdieu, 2000, p152). Burawoy (2018) cites gift exchange as a *'mechanism of symbolic domination'* (p71) presented by Bourdieu as a game-like activity often delayed and masked such that the receiver feels grateful for the gift even though the gift is only transferable because of the giver's field-positioned capacity to be the giver.

The nuanced complexity of how players cognise phenomena can be explored though what Bourdieu (1977a) refers to as 'misrecognition'. In a social realm players might recognise phenomena and attribute meaning to them, but Bourdieu suggests that meanings may be differently ascribed from player to player (Bourdieu, 1979a, 2000). James (2015) differentiates Bourdieu's sociological use of misrecognition from those discussed for example by Fraser (2007). He interprets misrecognition as *'…a social practice of individual or collective misattribution'* (James, 2015, p100) that is a societal truism that we often 'half-know' something and that to suit our habitus-informed positioning we might repress or choose to ascribe our own meaning. The relationship with symbolic violence is significant as Bourdieu emphasises how complicity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) is involved in how one social player does violence unto another. The gift exchange of symbolic violence needs complicity with disadvantaged players *'…reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them'* (Connolly and Healy, 2004, p15). Misrecognition can allow a player to form a compromise whereby they acquiesce to a *'dominant vision of the world'* (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002, p92; Mills, 2008; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu's thinking tools are widely applied to structure-agency relationships in the social world. School, MAT and TSA contexts and the wider context of the SISS are fields within which school leaders can be argued to have developed habitus and experienced hysteresis. Gift exchange, capital deployment, the symbolic violence associated with these and the misrecognition necessary for agentic sense-making, can all be usefully applied to these school leadership contexts.

2.2.3 Activity Theory

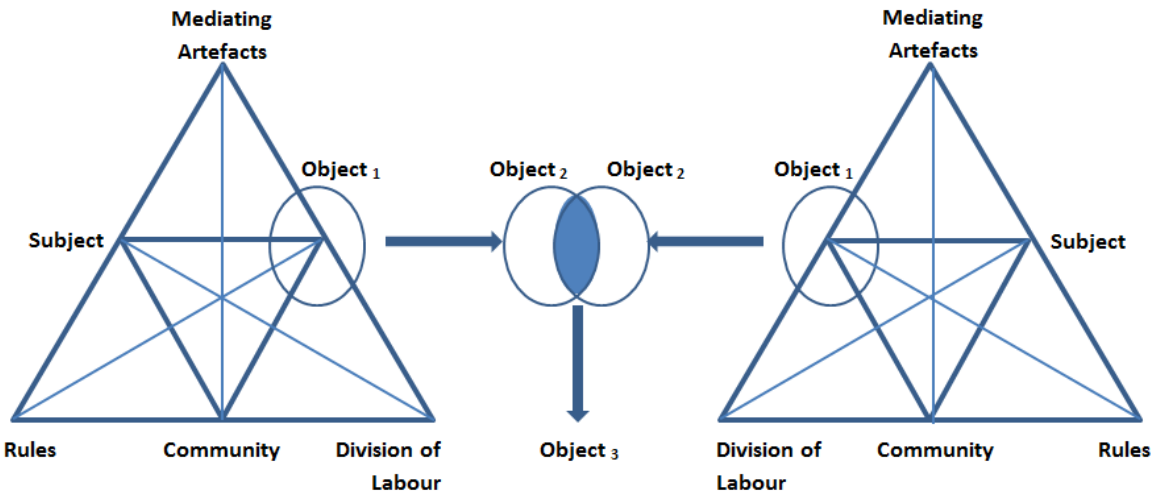
Activity Theory's seeks to theorise systems of activity. Its roots can be traced to Vygotsky who developed processes of 'mediation' (1978, 1986) from Marx's (1976, p284) concepts of *'labour'*, work as *'purposeful activity'* and the objects and instruments of such work. Vygotsky's approach connected the actions of social actors with cultural artefacts and saw subjects, or social agents, deploy mediational tools to provide purchase on an object to bring about a desired outcome (Vygotsky, 1978). Following work by Leont'ev (1978) in nuancing Vygotsky's model, Yrjö Engeström developed a second generation of Activity Theory to include communities, rules and divisions of labour within human systems (Engeström, 1987, 1999). In doing so Engeström foregrounded the *'…ambiguity, surprise, interpretation, sense making, and potential for change'* (Edwards *et al,* 2009, p196) that characterises object-oriented actions in complex systems. Expansion of the model, particularly by Il'enkov (1977, 1982), drove increasing focus on the role of contradiction in powering change in such systems.

*2.2.3.1 **Engeström's third and fourth generation Activity Theory***

In a third generation of Activity Theory (Figure 1) Engeström emphasised joint activity and practice and processes of social transformation. He now saw social activity as fundamentally conflictual and contradictory with such frictional processes seen as the *'…motive force of change and development'* (Engeström, 1999, p381). Mediating artefacts, communities, tools and division of labour are now

able to act on joint or common objects beyond a single system as well as within their local system. Any number of connected systems might deploy such artefacts to play on such shared objects and therefore mutual and more complex outcomes result across broader shared environments (Engeström, 2004).

Figure 1.



After: Engeström (1999, 2001 p136)

Engeström's Third Generation Activity Theory with two interacting activity systems as a minimal model

Cross-system objects are likely to be differently cognised by different players across an activity system. The SISS allows leaders within a MAT to view or understand a particular MAT-wide strategic challenge (an object) differently. Indeed, the community, rules and labour division within each school in a trust might themselves also have differing forms or conceptions. Engeström and Sannino (2021) refer to knotworking at the third generation, whereby *'knots of collaboration must be time and again reconstructed according to the shifting needs of the object and the problem at hand'* (p13),

accentuated by central power bases being beyond immediate control. They see such knotworking as *'both a risk and a possibility'* (p13).

From 2009 onwards, following work by Engeström and Sannino (Engeström, 2009; Sannino, Daniels and Gutierrez, 2009; Sannino 2017) and an intervention by Spinuzzi (2019) a fourth generation of Activity Theory has been proposed. It focuses on the:

> *'…multiple coalescing cycles of expansive learning involved within and across the activities involved, their relatively independent dynamics and their interdependency.'* Engeström and Sannino (2021) p15

Engeström and Sannino focus on solutions for big multi-agency problems at the global or national scale, seeing dynamic cycles of activity by heterogeneous parties as working in tackling shared or related overlapping objects. While third generation Activity Theory is perhaps the most obvious resolution for examining school groupings, complex government, LA, MAT, TSH and SAT inter-relationships mean that fourth generation theory also has much to offer. MATs and TSHs are part of a complex interrelated sector linked by RDs, government policy, local proclivities and individual positioning and activity system to activity system contexts are increasingly the norm. The neoliberal forces at play in English and global education structures (Chapman & Gunter, 2009; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019) may well be usefully explored via fourth generation Activity Theory.

2.2.3.2 Engeström's five key system-transformational principles

Engeström (2001, 2004) identifies five broad principles which, he argues, jointly influence social activity system transformation. These, alongside Bourdieu's thinking tools, figure significantly in helping frame my research.

The first principle is that the *'prime unit of analysis'* is the *'collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system, seen in its network relations'* (Engeström, 2001, p136). In a MAT an individual school (perhaps represented by an individual triangle in Figure 1) might have its Head of School (a subject) mediate a specific artefact such as an assessment policy to manipulate the school-level object of improved assessment outcomes. Other schools within the MAT will separately be engaged in similar activity and it is the multiple-constituted assessment outcomes across the trust as a whole that represent the multiple-created object(s) and outcome(s) for the activity system, or MAT, as a whole.

A second principle is that social activity systems are defined by 'multi-voicedness'. Engeström (2004) emphasises the conflicting agentic perspectives influencing complex activity systems. In complex activity networks like MATs and TSAs it is inevitable that multi-voicedness will be a key factor with Edwards *et al* (2009) suggesting that this *'…is a source of both tension and innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation'* (p197). Gunter's (2012, 2016) view of regimes of practice, with actors that *'defend their interest'* when in such a *'networked position in a field'* (2016, p114) chimes with ideas of multi-voicedness meaning that no single actor is likely to successfully truly control all resource. Indeed Harding (2000) argues that any complex organisation is *'…constructed through informal bargaining and the "tacit understandings" of its members'* (p55).

Engeström's third principle, 'historicity', emphasises the temporal influences and aspects of activity systems. The '*local history of the activity and its objects'* is considered alongside the *'history of the theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity'* (2001, p136-137). In the school system certain, *'concepts, procedures and tools'* (p137) are supplied nationally or regionally, for example by government, despite a rhetoric about the 'system' being 'self-improving', and then mediated at the local level, not least through local tradition and memory.

Multi-voicedness and historicity link to the fourth principle, 'contradiction'. Smith and Tushman suggest that *'recognizing and embracing contradictions leads to increased success'* (2005, p527). For Engeström, contradictions may not be observable directly but through their *'discursive manifestations'* (Engeström and Sannino, 2011, p369). They are *'…historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems'* (Engeström, 2001, p137) and result in discursive disagreements with players seeking contradictory solutions. Secondary contradictions (Giddens, 1984; Engeström, 2001; Fairhurst, Cooren and Cahill, 2002) result from new elements being introduced from outside. Such an *'aggravated secondary contradiction'* (Engeström, 2001, p137) develops when, for example, a new trust-wide or government policy conflicts with an existing policy in a school or grouping. Importantly, Engeström suggests that such contradiction can be seen positively with stronger, tested approaches or solutions emerging.

Engeström's final principle, 'expansive transformation' or 'expansive learning' describes transformation to new collaborative practices based on behaviour revised from established norms. He suggests that *'collective change effort'* may result from *'collective envisioning'* (2001, p137) and that this works when:

> *'…the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity.'* (p137)

Avis (2009, p152) suggests that such a process makes *'progressive possibilities'* realisable and can lead to *'transformative change'.* Subjects play their part in constructing new objects purposed for multiple subjects' collective activity. Usefully for this research expansive learning is seen by Engeström & Sannino (2010) as an analytical tool for '*moving up and outward'* in allowing focus on networks of interrelated activity systems with shared but contested objects as well as *'moving down and inward'* (p1) in tackling:

'…issues of subjectivity, experiencing, personal sense, emotion, embodiment, identity, and moral commitment.' (p1)

Hargreaves discussed how, within the SISS *'joint practice development'* can gain purchase on *'system architecture'* (2012b, p6). Such joint development may be enabled by expansive transformational activity and indeed, Hargreaves discussed at length how partnership and collaborative capitals within the SISS are activated to realise transformations beyond the individual school (2010, 2012b).

2.2.4 Leader positioning: a complementary approach to applying Bourdieu's thinking tools and Activity Theory

Engeström and his collaborators are clear that in identifying the expansive transformational processes existent in complex activity system structures, it remains critical that challenges for individual subjects within them are also understood:

'The system view of an organization is blatantly insufficient when the researchers try to understand and facilitate qualitative changes by means of expansive learning. Changes must be initiated and nurtured by real, identifiable people, individual persons and groups. The interventionist researcher must find within the activity system flesh-and-blood dialogue partners who have their own emotions, moral concerns, wills and agendas.' Engeström and Kerosuo (2007) p340

Bourdieu tells us that:

'The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it.' Bourdieu (1985) p734

Thus, in exploring the positioning of senior school leaders within the SISS, Engeström's five principles support investigation of system transformational context while Bourdieu's learning tools work with this to further assist enquiry into individual leader's experiences. In so-doing, agent and subject-focused extensions to activity theory, such as those identified by Daniels and Warmington (2007), including *'identity formation'* (p389), *'subject positioning'* and *'emotional experiencing'* (p378) might also become explicable. *'Identities in practice'* Holland *et al* (2001, p270) argue, can be seen as requiring internally *'figured worlds'* of individuals to be also *'socially identified'* (p271) with sense-making 'making sense' only when located within a field.

Marx (1976) saw primary contradictions between 'use value' and 'exchange value': the value realisable by using a resource as opposed to that realised when it is exchanged for a different resource. One of the few educational writers to have accessed both Bourdieu and Engeström is Williams (2012) who explores use and exchange value in mathematics education. He sees Activity Theory as concerned with use value via the mediation of artifacts, division of labour and the demonstrable use of resource by applying it to objects in complex systems. Bourdieu, he argues was more concerned with the exchange value of capital deployable via symbolic gift-exchanges. He concludes, however that:

> *'Educational capital… has its 'use' and 'exchange' value that can become economic 'use and exchange value' when it enhances the commodity labour power.'* Williams (2012) p70

Williams argues that there were weaknesses in early Activity Theory including its tendency to describe social reproductions rather than act as a tool of social liberation. Bourdieu's theory he argues, provides a sociological solution to some of these concerns when synthesised with Activity Theory. Engeström and Kerosuo (2007) have responded to such critiques in their development of how subjects inter-relate within increasingly complex systems. A converse view was offered by

Holland *et al* (2001) that Bourdieu's concept of field would benefit from Activity Theory's explanation of how the societal enters the subjective world of the individual.

2.2.5 Structure-agency environments – some conclusions

A theme throughout this second part of the literature review has been how research and literature have explored syntheses of individuals' psyches and their social contexts in the social world. This literature adds to educational leadership literature already reviewed, in providing a platform for my research. Giddens' (1984) dualist principle of agency informing structure and structure informing agency has been further nuanced via exploration of psychosocial approach, sense-making and positioning theory and ultimately via a consideration of how Bourdieu's agentically focused and Engeström's structurally focused theorisations can be synthesised. As Whittington (2010) reminds us, Giddens notes that social systems are *'overlapping, contradictory and precarious'* and that agency includes the capacity to *'follow one system of practices and to refuse another'* (p110-111) with social actors typically affected by multitudinous stimuli and motives. Giddens' emphasis on structuration theory leading to active practice involving interventions (Giddens, 1976; Whittington, 2010) is useful later in this thesis in my adoption of ethnographic, conversationally based approaches.

3 HISTORICAL AND THEMATIC CONTEXT

This chapter provides important context to the research. The first of two sections details historically important antecedents to the development of the SISS, important because participants in this research will have had early career assumptions configured within the period discussed and professional memory or culture affected by it. The second section explores four particularly relevant over-arching themes which ultimately contribute to later discussion.

3.1 Three periods of historical importance to this research

The first section of this chapter provides historical policy context that will have impacted on my participants. The period between the 1988 Education Reform Act and the Labour victory in 1997 saw significant policy crystallisations, albeit in some ways, conflicting ones (Pierson, 1998), that ultimately led to the SISS. The New Labour period between 1997 and 2010 proved that conflicting centralising and decentralising educational policies were not limited to Conservative regimes (Heath *et* al, 2013) and in fact were consolidated significantly under this centre-left administration. Finally, from 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and Conservative administrations started with the 2010 white paper (DfE, 2010) and the Academies Act (Academies Act, 2010), paving the way for more recent substantial growth of MATs and further developments to TSAs.

3.1.1 1988-1997: Post-1988 Education Reform Act Conservative period

The 1988 Education Reform Act brought to fruition a long-standing discussion among politicians and some parts of society about a more accountable and higher attaining, systematised school sector. It introduced the opportunity for schools to apply for Grant Maintained (GM) status and in so doing, remove themselves from local government control (Levacic and Hardman, 2010; Halpin, Power and Fitz, 1993, 1997; West and Bailey, 2013). Under Local Management of Schools, financial control

moved to the headteacher and governing body (Simkins, 1994). City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were introduced as autonomous, directly funded schools aimed at improving outcomes in inner city areas (Whitty, Edwards and Gewirtz, 1993).

Halpin, Power and Fitz (1993) identified two paradoxes faced by schools that had 'opted-out' via GM status which are largely repeated in Greany and Earley's (2022) examination of the longer view. In 1993, Halpin, Power and Fitz suggested that:

> *'…GM heads have limited room for manoeuvre because their activities are severely constrained by the central state, a chief concern of which is to affirm their role as key actors in the process of restructuring educational provision.'* (1993) p16

They argued that promised autonomies were offset by constraints in complying with the rules associated with GM status.

The introduction of CTCs was a symbolic moment in the development of Conservative education policy (Simon, 1999; McCulloch, 2002). Independent from LA control (Gorard, 2018), they represented early evidencing of privatising and marketising ideals in public education via the process of compulsory competitive tendering and part-sponsorship (Ball, 2017). They were within the state system but had control over their own admissions, funding and operation and could accept partial funding from industry sponsors (Walford and Miller, 1991; Whitty, Edwards and Gewirtz, 1993).

Husbands (1996) suggests that during the period between 1988 and the 1993 Education Act there were:

> *'…powerful countervailing pressures in the professional culture of schooling and in the logic of the market place which encouraged schools in a variety of ways to collaborate or to form formal and informal consortia.'* (p9)

In the years running up to 1997 schools were forming networks to: *'…exploit opportunities for additional resources'* (Connolly and James, 2006, p69) and to resolve issues locally. Glatter (1995), Stevenson (2007) and Courtney (2015b) suggest that schools were necessarily, rediscovering professional collaborations that had been supported by local education authorities through the 1970s and 1980s.

Ultimately, Technology Colleges, introduced in 1993 and developing from CTCs, can be considered a direct antecedent of academy schools. They were an important example of an incentivised initiative encouraging schools to lead locally, work with other schools and with communities (Gorard and Taylor, 2001; West *et al,* 2000). GM schools and CTCs set the course for future initiatives, most notably the academies programme.

3.1.2 1997-2010: The New Labour period

Under New Labour a climate developed based on a strengthening 'government regime' of practice (Gunter, 2012). A growing environment of collaborative competition involved headteachers, civil servants, policy makers, entrepreneurs and academics (Macbeth, McCreath and Aitchison, 1995; Glatter, 1995, 2003; Husbands, 1996; Wallace, 1998). This period saw emphases on the National Curriculum, National Strategies and Ofsted alongside efforts to modernise schools by developing leadership and networks (Bush, 2016). New Labour's National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the associated National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) exemplified centralising approach to system improvement (Male, 2001; Earley and Evans, 2004; Munby, 2019; Brighouse and Waters, 2021).

New Labour initiatives emphasising school leadership and school leaders collaborating included the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) (SSAT, 2007), the National Workforce Agreement (ATL *et al*, 2003) and an emphasis on school Federations. The Primary National Strategy was launched in

2003 along with the government's 'Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools' (DfES, 2003a). In launching the Strategy, Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, adopted a rhetoric that became an increasing theme through the remaining New Labour years:

> *'…it's time to give more power and initiative back to schools - so that teachers themselves can better use their own professional knowledge and abilities to drive progress building on their success.'* Clarke (2003) n.p.

Hartley (2006) argues that Labour added *'a process of cultural transformation'* (p5) to the previous government's structural transformational efforts and by 2009, the government assumed increasing market-focused approach with the Secretary of State, Ed Balls, saying governing bodies should use:

> *'…the flexibilities that they already have to determine an appropriate level of pay for… heads in a way that is not constrained by the maximum of the leadership pay range but is appropriate, fair and transparent.'* Balls (2009) n.p.

The City Academies initiative emerged in 2000 (Learning and Skills Act, 2000). Independent of local authorities and funded by recurrent and preferential funding (Gorard, 2018), they were a policy response to a discourse emphasising 'school failure', particularly in deprived inner-city areas, with earlier Conservative strategies influencing them, including injection of private resource into the state system (Gorard, 2005, 2009, 2018; Chitty, 2008, 2009; Gillard, 2008; Gunter, 2011; West and Bailey, 2013). Writing towards the end of the New Labour years, Chitty (2008) observed that:

> *'…in so many ways, the Academies initiative is a New Labour version of the Conservatives' CTC project.'* p23

City Academies were envisioned as replacements for existing schools, often re-built and part-funded with sponsors from the private or third sectors. They differed from CTCs in that they were not, as

Labour Secretary of State, David Blunkett saw it: *'…parachuted in like cuckoos in the nest, for good or ill'* (HC Deb 27 June, 2000, cols 751-752). Differing from the previous government's approach, Blunkett aimed at replacing poorly performing schools and the word 'academy' underlined his desire to break: *'…the cycle of disadvantage and low expectation.'* (HC Deb 15 March 2000, col 300). Replacing schools in *'…spirals of decline'* (Gorard, 2018, p90), such schools were typically re-named and often rebuilt with new leadership in place and with sponsorship packages which led to the use of the term 'sponsored academy'. Meanwhile, in parallel with City Academy developments, the Specialist Schools programme had developed whereby schools had curriculum specialisms, a focus on school improvement, expertise and resource sharing and community working. Their direct funding by government and small amounts of external sponsorship, provided an enticing lure (West *et al,* 2000; Gorard and Taylor, 2001; West and Bailey, 2013).

Early sponsored academies needed a non-state sponsor in the form of an organisation, an individual or a business. The aim was to inject private sector leadership to 'turn around' failing schools. Sponsors contributed 10% of capital costs up to a maximum of £2m with the balance initially coming from local authorities (West and Bailey, 2013; Walford, 2014). All such academies also had to be Specialist Schools and early changes saw financial, legal and accountability rules alter, rural schools also qualifying and with funding coming exclusively from central government (Ball, 2007; Papanastasiou, 2017).

Building on regime theory (Harding, 2000) and theory of practice (Bourdieu, 2000), Gunter (2012) points to 'regimes of practice' evident between 1997 and 2010, defining a regime of practice as a:

> *'…networked position in a field, where people associate and contract exchange relationships in order to develop and defend their interests.'* (2016) p114

Gunter identifies three main regimes of practice as evident in the school leadership field in the UK during this period, the government regime, the research regime and the practice regime (Gunter, 2012, 2016; Gunter and Forrester, 2009). The government regime is particularly pertinent to this period with Gunter (2012) referring to it as the 'New Labour Policy Regime'. Gunter sees heterarchical governance cultures (Lawn and Lingard, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Ball, 2009) as important at this time, with the government making engagement attractive to school leaders via symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1980):

> *'…by communicating with the profession (particularly through headteacher conferences) and enabling those who were brought in as advisers to believe they had the potential to influence policy.'* Gunter (2012) p81

By 2010, David Hargreaves' work with the NCSL was to capture the growing idea of a SISS, presenting it with the authority associated with a respected academic. The 'government regime' (Gunter and Forrester, 2009; Gunter, 2012) had developed in such a way that Hargreaves' four 'thinkpieces' (Hargreaves, 2010, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b), both reflected this New Labour 'regime' and the Coalition and Conservative governments' approaches to follow.

3.1.3 2010 onwards: Conservative led governments, MAT mainstreaming, TSAs and a new 'middle-tier'

With the arrival of the Conservative-led Liberal Democrat coalition and two policy documents critical to this study, the White Paper *'The importance of teaching'* (DfE, 2010) and the Academies Act (2010), TSAs and particularly MATs came to adopt critical policy prominence.

Identifying the introduction of a national network of Teaching Schools, a key policy announcement of the 2010 White Paper, Hargreaves discussed ideas of *'complex collaboration'* and *'strategic alliances'* (2011a, p6) and a *'double challenge, one local and one national'* (2011a, p29). Teaching Schools, via

their own alliances, would lead staff training and development and lead school improvement through school-to-school support locally (NCSL, 2011) and would work with each other nationally, co-developing innovations. Arguably originating in CTCs (Walford, 1991, 2014; Hargreaves, 2011a; Matthews and Berwick, 2013), Teaching Schools progressed from 'Training Schools', developed in 2000 by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (Hagger and McIntyre, 2006). Training Schools originated from a governmental desire for school-based initial preparation of teachers in England following 1990s projects (Furlong *et al* 1996; Furlong *et al* 2000) which had identified 'ideal typical' models for partnership-based initial teacher education (Furlong *et al* 2000).

The eventual introduction of Teaching Schools in 2010 can be seen as a natural conclusion of a clear but slow 'policy turn', identified by Cochran-Smith (2005a, 2005b), with governments moving teacher preparation from the academic realm of universities towards the professional context of schools themselves (Furlong *et al,* 2008; Menter *et al,* 2010; Husbands, 2012; Chapman, 2014; Greany and Brown, 2015). This neoliberal 'policy problem' (Cochran-Smith, 2005b) resulted in Teaching Schools delivering against four key areas (NCSL, 2011) which quickly became the 'Big 6', creating an over-stretching challenge for Teaching Schools and their alliances:

- *School-led initial teacher training (ITT)*
- *Continuing professional development (CPD)*
- *School to school support (StSS)*
- *Identifying and developing leadership potential*
- *Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs)*
- *Research and Development (R&D)*

Gu *et al* (2015) p34

Following an evaluation by Gu *et al* (2014, 2015) it became clear that a consolidated role for TSAs was necessary and the 'Big 6' became the 'Big 3':

- professional and leadership development

- initial teacher training
- school to school support

Teaching Schools Council (2020)

However, continued establishment of a nationwide network of teaching schools was increasingly affected by a parallel key policy area, the development of academies. Gu *et al* (2015) specifically commented on the '*different purposes'* (p180) of TSAs and MATs and their different organisational structures and accountability arrangements. They suggested that MATs exhibited *tighter* partnership while TSAs had *more fluid* partnership, particularly relating to governance and accountability (p180). In the DfE's January 2019 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy' the tendency towards MATs picking-up the role of system school improvement seemed to be coming to fruition:

> *'In particular, we want to bring more multi-academy trusts (MATs) – with proven records of driving improvement – more squarely into our school improvement offer.'* DfE (2019b) p14

However, in May 2019 teaching schools were put under review by the DfE (2019a). A revised, hub-based structure aimed to support over 2000 '*struggling schools*' via a three-year programme to *'drive up standards'* from 2020-21 (TSC, 2019, n.p.). Hargreaves' (2010) focus on clustered solutions at the local level was weakened here with a further crystallising trend towards teaching school structures operating at regional rather than local resolutions.

In February 2021, 87 teaching school hubs (TSHs), replaced the original 750 TSAs (DfE, 2021a). Centralising approach has replaced the local, with TSHs securing three-years of annual grant funding. TSHs are overseen by a 'Teaching School Hubs Council' with an advisory and capacity-building remit and with eight of its nine members being senior leaders from MATs (DfE, 2021a). TSHs deliver a range of initial teacher education, early career training, NPQs and other professional development (DfE, 2021a).

Policy on academies has also developed. The 2010 white paper (DfE, 2010) introduced 'converter' academies:

> *'It is our ambition that Academy status should be the norm for all state schools, with schools enjoying direct funding and full independence from central and local bureaucracy.'* DfE (2010) p52

Academy sponsorship was now based on sponsors creating a private company with charitable status and this then entering into a funding agreement with central government (Papanastasiou, 2017; Education Funding Agency (EFA), 2017; Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), 2017), but since 2010 it no longer required sponsors to provide financial contributions (Roberts, 2017). The move to non-sponsored, converter academies was initially only open to Ofsted 'outstanding' schools, but from 2011 any schools seen as 'performing well' and prepared to support another less-well performing school, were invited to apply (DfE, 2011; West and Bailey, 2013). Many early converters arguably did so because of perceived financial advantages, with all academies receiving direct grants as well as a share of the relevant LA's allocation for services to schools (Bassett *et al,* 2012; Hall, Gunter and Bragg, 2013; West and Bailey, 2013; Cirin, 2014; West, 2015). In uncertain financial times, promises of autonomy and at least short-term financial advantage were attractive to many.

There have been several obstacles to realising the MAT-based system. Commentaries by West (2015), Rayner, Courtney and Gunter (2018), Crawford *et al* (2022), Cousin and Gu (2022) and Gilbert (2022) combine in identifying four compelling ones: an enduring loyalty to LA 'maintained' structures particularly by many primary schools; that many diocesan schools have resisted academy status; that many early converter academies did so as standalone academies and have retained this status; and that a number of trust groupings are only notionally MATs, perhaps with as little as two schools.

With 70.9% of English secondary schools as academies by 2022 (DfE, 2022c) and with the majority figure already having been achieved by the end of the Coalition government in 2015, it remains important to consider West's (2015) critique that this majority of secondary schools are:

> *'…owned by non-profit making trusts, bound by contract law, and subject to independent – not state maintained – school regulations, and under the control of central government.'* p31

However, the proportion of primary schools that have not become academies or are standalone academies remains counter to Government aspirations (West, 2015). Nicky Morgan's 2016 *'every school an academy'* plan (DfE, 2016a, p55; Long and Bolton, 2016) had been retracted (Adams, 2016; DfE, 2016b) with an affirmation instead that underperforming LA schools would be converted. Academisation is seemingly a *'system redesign'* goal now reaching beyond policy and beyond the individual school (Rayner, Courtney and Gunter, 2018, p147), an aspiration restated in a 2022 DfE white paper (DfE, 2022a, 2022b).

From 2015 a newly shaped school sector middle-tier (Muir, 2014; Woods and Simkins, 2014; Simkins *et al,* 2015; Simkins *et al,* 2018) was developing in England. The National Schools Commissioner role came into existence in 2014 to oversee eight Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) (DfE, 2016c; Durbin *et al*, 2015; Schools Commissioners Group, 2020), now renamed Regional Directors (RDs). Hill (2012) and Michael Wilshaw, on taking-up the Chief Inspector of Schools role in 2011 (BBC News, 2011), had argued for a local schools' commissioner role in the period following the 2010 white paper. The RSCs that emerged, however represented an increasingly recentralising approach to the new middle-tier (Simkins *et al,* 2018; DfE, 2022d). By 2022 RD responsibilities had grown (DfE, 2022d) to include:

- intervening in academies that Ofsted has judged inadequate or where governance is inadequate
- deciding on conversion applications from LA maintained schools

- encouraging and deciding on sponsorship applications and acting to improve poorly performing sponsors
- taking decisions on the creation and growth of MATs, on transferring academies from one trust to another and deciding on applications to significantly change academies or free schools
- advising on new free schools proposals and on whether to cancel, defer or enter into free school funding agreements
- offering support to maintained schools and academies judged to require improvement by Ofsted
- intervening in maintained schools judged to be inadequate by Ofsted, providing them with sponsorship support

RDs act by validating much of their work though an Advisory Board (AB) designed to *'provide advice, scrutiny and challenge'* (DfE, 2021b, p4). These comprise headteachers, former headteachers, trustees, business leaders and academy trust CEOs, either elected, appointed, or co-opted (DfE, 2021b). It can be argued that MATs, other school groupings such as TSHs, federations and other forms of trust (Chapman, 2015; Woods and Simkins, 2014), local authorities, dioceses and RDs and ABs represent a complex, confusing and inconsistent, changing 'middle-tier' (Crawford *et al*, 2022). Wilkins (2017) provides a helpful frame for understanding these processes by contrasting Lubienski's (2014) process of *'disintermediation'* or:

> *'…the withdrawal of power and influence from intermediate or "meso-level" educational authorities that operate between local schools and national entities'* Lubienski (2014) p424

...with what Wilkins himself, has termed *'reintermediation'* (Wilkins, 2016, p74), whereby organisations such as MATs:

> *'…supplant the bureau-professional role of local government as deliverers and overseers of education provision.'* Wilkins (2017) p180

These forces of disintermediation and reintermediation at the middle-tier level in the school system in England exemplify the paradoxical centralisation versus decentralisation perspectives explored earlier (Caldwell, 2005; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005; Bush, 2016; Greany and Earley, 2022) and provide a rich context for considering the positioning of senior leaders within the SISS.

3.1.4 The importance of historical context to this research

In exploring senior leader positioning and by encouraging participants to talk openly about what has influenced them and how their career-stories have developed, this research is itself deeply positioned within the recent history of education as pertinent to current school leaders. My research participants' positionings are likely to be influenced by policy and practice from before their own careers and their ultimate progressions into leadership roles, as well as on their own direct professional memories. Professional memory is fundamental in the development of habitus (Bourdieu, 1979b; Goodson and Choi, 2008) and in crises of hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1996a, 2000), and is also relevant to organisational historicity, important within Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001). As such, professional memory and historical contextualisation are critical in supporting an understanding of leaders' sense-making attempts and important in underpinning this research and in interpreting its findings.

Having taken a chronological approach to relevant developments since 1988, four specific overarching themes are now more specifically identified and explored.

3.2 Four over-arching themes of importance to this research

Having considered three historical periods from 1988 onwards and established a contextual chronology relevant to senior leader influence, professional memory and career-story, I now discuss four over-arching themes. These themes run through and across the historical chronology and are

important in contextualising senior leader narratives explicated in the findings of this research. They are:

- Neoliberalism and educational leadership
- Government, local authorities and the changing 'middle-tier'
- The importance of collaboration
- The 'promise' of autonomy

Each theme has significance to the research object, senior leader positioning within the SISS and bears expansion over and above the discussion of historical context prior to the presentation and discussion of my own findings.

3.2.1 Neoliberalism and education leadership

My research focus is contextualised by policy in its various forms and the discourses, texts and technologies (Ball, 2007) associable with them. School leader positioning is profoundly affected by neoliberal policy technologies such as marketisation, managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2006; Ozga, 2009; Chitty, 2014; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019). Neoliberalism describes socio-political stances that advance corporate models of organisation based on competition (Lipman, 2011; Lakes and Carter, 2011; Exley and Ball, 2014; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014; Apple, 2017). Trowler (2003) identifies three manifestations of neoliberalism in the education field: free market economics, reduced government intervention and expansion of choice. Neoliberalism is relatable to neoconservative perspectives associated with a desire for a supposed 'return' to higher standards, ideas of common culture and perhaps mythologised idylls of official knowledge (Gillborn, 2008; Apple, 2000, 2017). Apple (2006) suggests that neoliberalism results in *'thin democracy'* (p11) emphasising education as a tool for realising a set of limited ideological and economically determined needs as determined by an elite (Apple 2006, 2016). Contemporary school leaders are

arguably positioned by conflicting laudable discourses of democratic and authentic leadership (West-Burnham, 2009; Wilson, 2014), but within a context of such thin democracy.

Neoliberal objectives advance via recentralising governments surreptitiously manipulating school sectors. That education should have a liberating role via a critical social theoretical stance (Freire, 2018) is counter to neoliberal change. Freire, for example, saw neoliberalism as a discourse that *'…speaks about the death of dreams and utopia and deproblematizes the future'* (2004, p110). Tett and Hamilton (2019) encourage resistance via a reproblematisation of pedagogies and surrounding structures in education. Alexander (2004; 2008) challenged weak pedagogical theorisation and practice resulting from the English National Curriculum and associated accountability and assessment structures and Bates, Lewis and Pickard (2019), Ball (2017) and Apple (2000) also identified growing reform-based policy norms which they argued, narrowed curricular and pedagogical agency.

The extent to which MAT and TSA senior leaders evidence awareness about their own neoliberal context is of critical interest. Higham and Earley (2013) discuss ideas of leader powerlessness in relation to the aims and purposes of schooling although they suggest variability in teachers' perceived agency. Hoyle and Wallace (2007), adopting 'irony' as an organising concept while reviewing evidence on teacher behaviours, suggest three forms of leader response: commitment to external policy, ambivalence to it, and minimal compliance by those who subtly adapt their policy responses, outwardly satisfying requirements but in their own institutions acting individually. Hoyle and Wallace refer to this latter group as exercising *'principled infidelity'* (2007, p705) and argue that such teachers follow their own instincts while convincing policy monitors that they are implementing with fidelity.

Market or quasi-market approaches it can be argued, have brought a mimicking or adoption of the trappings and processes of the business world (Gunter, 2012, 2016; Gorard, 2018) with Timmins (2020) contending that state-maintained schools appear *'less corporate and more about maintaining*

the unique characteristics of the school' (p55). In analysing privatisation processes in schools, Ball and Youdell (2008) identify two forms. Endogenous privatisation involves schools becoming more business-like and includes the embracing of managerialism, quasi-markets, accountability and performativity and equates to 'new managerialism' (Clarke *et al,* 2000; Hall, Gunter and Bragg, 2013; Lynch 2014). 'New managerialism' was exemplified by managerial processes, target setting and staff performance monitoring, workforce restructuring, quasi-markets for services and combinations of public and private activity presented as business 'partnership' (Vogt, 2001; Farrell and Morris, 2003; Deem and Brehony, 2005). Ball and Youdell's second form of privatisation involves more than this. Exogenous privatisation involves businesses being directly involved in the running of public services such as schools (Rikowski, 2003; Ball, 2007; Ball and Youdell, 2008) and in England has most obviously manifested itself through academy sponsorship, particularly in the earlier years of academisation. School leader philosophies and behaviours and the leadership 'types' and styles individuals subscribe to are increasingly challenged by a seemingly inexorable neoliberal advance, with endogenous and exogenous trends and the quasi-market positioning them.

Finally here, a promise that goes hand-in-hand with competition is that of parental choice in schooling (Reay and Lucey, 2003). With the market or quasi-market (Gorard, 1998b) of academy schools being underpinned by allocation of direct budget from central government to the school or Trust (Wolfe, 2013; Courtney, 2015b), there is a challenge to schools, Trusts and their leaders in attracting what they determine to be an appropriate body of students to their needs, mission or business plan (West and Bailey, 2013). The post-2010 landscape has further emphasised this consumerist agenda and an arguable freeing of schools from governmental structure. Academies are positioned by the Government as part of a story whereby schools appear or 'feel' individualistic thereby advancing the narrative that they each 'play to their own strengths' and provide an increasingly heterogeneous school-supply landscape (Gorard, 1998a; 1999). Parental choice is accompanied by schools and MATs marketing themselves in a competitive environment and school

leaders are positioned by moral questions of local and community purpose, accessibility, equitability and the realities of moral and contingent leadership (Fullan, 2003; Gu and Johansson, 2013) discussed above.

3.2.2 Government, local authorities and the changing 'middle-tier'

A key contextual factor for school leaders in the SISS is the reduction of the role of local authorities (Rowley and Dyson, 2012; Gunter and McGinity, 2014; Greany, 2015; Gunter *et al,* 2015; Simkins *et al,* 2015; Ball, 2017; Greany and Higham, 2018; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019; Brighouse and Waters, 2021; Crawford *et al*, 2022). This is contextualised within the changing middle-tier (Muir, 2014; Simkins *et al*, 2015) as discussed earlier.

The LA can be argued to have provided consistency in context across UK regions and a general approach nationally, since the 1944 Education Act (Ball, 2017). While local authorities have varied in approach, effectiveness and the trust invested in and earned by them, it can be posited that the England-wide system of authorities provided at least a 'feeling' of a cohesive, shared, public service approach to the system of schooling (Cerit, 2009; Woods and Simkins, 2014; Simkins, 2015; Simkins *et al,* 2015). The language used in analysing school systems is useful here. LA schools have attracted the official adjective 'maintained' and indeed, the LA part of the sector itself is often referred to using the same word. Ranson described the LA system as providing governance via the *'assumptions of professional expertise reinforced by the orderly controls of rational bureaucracy'* (2008, p205) and Newman (2007) discussed the extent to which the LA system is 'public' in its governance and operation. It is this 'maintenance' approach that is evidenced in successive government White Papers (DfE,2010; 2016a; 2022a), as anathema to policy trajectory (Denholm and Garrett, 2001; Lingard and Ozga, 2007; Newman, 2007; Woods and Simkins, 2014; Courtney, 2015a). Schools, it is argued, should be proactive and competing for success, not 'maintained' in an apparently passive way.

An apparent and contestable, ideological move to 'small government' at both the central and local levels arguably also provides rationale for the SISS (Leaton Gray, 2013; Greany, 2015). Under the 2010-15 Conservative- Liberal Democrat Coalition government this was evidenced by early policy emphasis on a 'Big Society' with a participatory, local emphasis on free schools but conflicting policy support for corporatisation and the growth of non-local chains of academy schools (Goodwin, 2011; Leaton Gray, 2013; Ball, 2017; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019). A parallel critical narrative, however, is that central government's real motives over several decades have been more about reducing the power of political adversaries at the local governmental level and reducing the funding responsibility for what has often been portrayed as an expensive middle-tier bureaucracy (Goodwin, 2011; Ball, 2017). The 2010 to 2012 period in which Hargreaves was writing his 'thinkpieces' (2010, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b) coincided not only with the election of the Conservative- Liberal Democrat Coalition government in 2010 but also the *'bonfire of the quangos'* (Parkinson, 2010, n.p.) via which the government closed a range of quasi-autonomous educational bodies seen as expensive and possibly, sometimes 'off-message' (Munby, 2019; Brighouse and Waters, 2021) and the introduction of austerity as a government policy (Blyth, 2013; Griffiths, 2015; Lewis and West, 2017). Arguably, a move to smaller government has been accompanied by an increase in central government influence over a tranche of schools disconnected from LA structures, something which is highly relevant to the positioning of contemporary school leaders.

Arguably, the traditional status of local authorities is enmeshed in the story of post 1944 bi- or tripartite systems and the comprehensive project (Ball, 2017). Perhaps the purest form of state intervention in education was that of comprehensivism and there is arguably a continuing professional memory cognisant of the early 1970s' peak in comprehensive school start-ups and the 1976-1979 period when it became official national policy (Martin, 2015; Martin and Benn, 2017, 2018; Ball 2017; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019). Courtney (2015b) suggests that there were strong *'discursive associations of this 'common schooling' with fairness'* but that ultimately the LA

comprehensive project was undone by a failing economy and associated *'derisory depictions of 'bog-standard' comprehensives'* (p800) and a lack of a spirited broader political defence.

Participants in my research will have had differing perspectives of LA diminution as their career-stories have developed and the changing middle-tier is an important context for their experience. The 'discursive associations' Courtney (2015b) refers to in relation to comprehensivism, will exist in relation to a range of different factors associated with governmental structural intentions and change and will reside variously in all senior leaders' professional memories.

3.2.3 The importance of collaboration

Fundamental within Hargreaves' 'thinkpieces' was his thinking about partnership and collaboration in a SISS. Most notably this was reiterated, between 2010 and 2012 as *'co-construction in family clusters'* (2010, p10), *'complex collaboration'* (2011a, p6) and *'maturity'* via *'partnership competence'* and *'collaborative capital'* (2012b, p13 and p22). As I will explore later, the academies project has ultimately become a grouped collaborative model, as manifested in MATs. Teaching Schools are predicated on an alliance and more recently, hub basis as well.

In discussing policy-driven partnerships in the context of the 'school-led' SISS, Greany identifies three key categories:

- *'structural governance models, such as multi-academy trusts (MATs) or academy chains and federations*
- *designations based on formal criteria, such as National Leaders in Education (NLEs) and Teaching Schools*
- *role-related partnerships, such as where an executive head oversees two or more schools (but not in a formal federation)'* (2017) p56-57

Such partnerships provide the context for the development of the 'system leader' (Cousin, 2019; Cousin and Gu, 2022). Cousins and Gu remind us however that beyond the *'positive rhetoric'* (p193) about school collaboration, the *'realities of implementation'* are challenging and Armstrong, Brown and Chapman's (2021) configurative review of school-to-school collaboration confirms this.

Under Greany's second category, mechanisms developed such as Teaching Schools and their alliances as well as the designations associated with National Support Schools including National and Local Leaders in Education (NLEs and LLEs), National Leaders in Governance and Specialist Leaders in Education, particularly following the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010). In parallel, structural governance models as described in Greany's first category were also developing in the form of academy trusts and federations.

Collaborative approaches had been emphasised by Tim Brighouse in his design of London Challenge (Muijs *et al,* 2011; Hutchings *et al,* 2012; Ainscow *et al,* 2012; Greany, 2017) whereby 'consultant headteachers' supported others by involving the staff in both host and support school in a co-design model (Baars *et al,* 2004; Ainscow, 2015). This played directly to key themes in Hargreaves' 'thinkpieces' including *'co-construction'* (2010) and *'joint practice development'* (2011a). The London Challenge 'mooring alongside' approach of consultant heads (Earley and Weindling, 2006; Hill and Matthews, 2010; Muijs, 2015) was adopted in the 2010 White Paper and NLEs and TSAs were advocated significantly as a similar solution in this and in Hargreaves' 2010-2012 'thinkpieces'. Hargreaves (2010) reflected on the varied collective nouns used for school collaboratives, noting 'cluster', 'network', 'chain' and 'family'. He settled on City Challenge's *'family cluster'* (p6) because of the way it suggested organic and sustainable relationships. Interestingly, the government rekindled *'family of schools'* rhetoric in its 2022 white paper (DfE, 2022a, 2022b).

A range of literature emphasises how formal designations, for example that of NLE, have resulted in effective collaborative work (Hill and Matthews, 2008, 2010; Chapman, 2013; Gu *et al,* 2015). A trend

towards MAT models replacing some functions of these earlier designations has however, re-emphasised processes of competition and a phenomenon whereby MATs can tend to look inwards in supporting their own schools rather than outwards and beyond the MAT (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017). In 2015 Armstrong was able to report:

> *'The level of inter-school collaboration… appears to be increasing with the growth and expansion of MATs and TSAs adding to the complexity of this landscape.'* p32

Network governance (Meuleman, 2008; Janssens and Ehren, 2016), whereby policy links organisations around a public policy goal (Mayne and Rieper, 2003), is argued to operate in a sometimes-unstable environment in the UK (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017). My research therefore has a particular interest in the degree to which MATs and TSA senior leaders focus collaborative effort primarily within their own grouping or perhaps, beyond them.

3.2.4 The 'promise' of autonomy

Practical ways in which leaders relate to policy (Ozga, 2000) have altered since the height of LA and comprehensive dominance (Chitty, 2014; Martin and Benn, 2017, 2018) and reductions in LAs' critical mass has been argued by several authors (Hursh, 2005; Chitty, 2009; Gunter, 2016; Thomson, 2020) to have caused greater complexity in the way autonomy for school leaders, exhibits itself. The OECD (2011) identified increases in school autonomy in the English and other systems, but Matthews and Ehren (2022) argue that increased school-level autonomy in areas such as resourcing, curriculum and assessment has been at the 'cost' of greater accountability.

In 2010, the new Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove's, proclamation that leaders: *'…need to be liberated in schools set free from bureaucratic control'* (Gove, 2010, n.p.) became a repeated tenet of post-2010 governmental rationale. There are two key contexts within which the reality of individual leader-level autonomy can be explored. The first is the 'understanding' between individual

leaders and the government in the years following 2010 and the degree to which school leaders felt that this understanding has been honoured or proved true. Higham and Earley (2013) and Simkins (1997, 2014) discuss the difference between the *'criterion power'* and *'operational* power' (Simkins, 2014, p989) that leaders can variably activate within themselves and their contexts. Criterion power includes the ability to define a service provided while operational power is concerned with how the service is provided and resourced and Simkins (2014) argues that while operational power has been embraced by individual leaders, criterion power has been clawed back by central government as local authorities have diminished. The second 'understanding' concerns the degree to which such school leaders' realisations of feelings or autonomy have been met within the MATs and TSAs in which they are employed. Glatter (2012), Higham and Earley (2013), Simkins (2014) and Malen and Vincent Cochran (2015) all argue that autonomy at the individual level has been limited and that in reality such autonomies have more to do with individual style and personally selected definitions of agency. Gibton (2017) suggests that the system architecture of *'charter culture'* in fact means that:

> *'…the powerful force of system reform limits their autonomy and recentralises it under new, and perhaps stricter, burdens which can interfere with their work.'* (p42)

That accountability increases with autonomy, as Matthews and Ehren (2022) identify, means that school leaders have to balance these two things (Greany, 2015). Middlewood, Abbott and Robinson (2018) suggest that increased freedoms for schools accepting academy status, such as greater control of curriculum, approach to paying staff and procuring services, have been at an accountability cost that for many might negate the benefits gained. They posit that any *'autonomy of leadership earned by them'* (p25) was normally via gaining an 'outstanding' judgement from Ofsted. This they (and Robinson, 2012) argue involved 'playing a game' involving acquiescence to government agendas as measured by Ofsted so as to attract the necessary inspection judgement and therefore the opportunity to convert to academy status.

3.2.5 The value in exploring neoliberalism, governmentality, collaboration and autonomy

Across the chronology discussed in section 3.1, several recurring themes emerge. The four specific themes covered above have been isolated for further examination however, because they are cross-cutting and because they are of particular and profound value to this study. Governmentality, changing governmental contexts within a neoliberal world and recurring emphases on collaborative expectations and promises of autonomy, transect educational leadership as a domain of study as framed by this research. Issues arising from these themes are particularly significant in the way they seem to affect school leaders affected by and operating within the SISS in England.

Following the review of literature and the exploration of context, this thesis now considers the research methodology and design adopted in my own research into school leader positioning within the SISS in England.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

My research question is aimed at an explication of how those who find themselves in leadership positions at or near the top of school based organisations in England experience structure-agency dualities and are positioned. It is:

> ***How do senior leaders in Multi Academy Trusts and associated Teaching School Alliances view their own position and agency within the developing 'self-improving school system' in England?***

Themes that emerge from this question relate to participants':

- Positioning in relation to apparent policy assumptions that they are supposedly leading the system from the local or the school-grouping level.
- Views on any positioning incongruities associated with their lived experiences of (re)centralising and/or decentralising educational policy.
- Feelings about and recognition of their positioning, changes in their positioning and their roles and careers given their own philosophies and motivations.
- Positioning by other agents, mutable and often fragmentary structures and the educational policy context in which they find themselves.

In this chapter I introduce the research design and key considerations associated with it and explain the methods adopted. I also present methodological and theoretical perspective and the analytical approach used. I start by presenting the design frame.

4.1 Research design frame: case study

This research involved 21 conservational interviews, each of approximately an hour's duration, split across seven MATs, each with an associated TSA. Three senior leaders were interviewed in each of these organisations. My design frame is that of the *'multiple'* or *'nested'* case study (Thomas, 2011, p517). This is because the research subjects are multiple senior leadership agents who work in interrelated ways in leading different but similarly contextualised parts of the SISS. The *'case'* (Stake, 2005, p443; Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2011) therefore is a multi-nodal, grouped cadre of senior leaders working in a commonly identified part of the SISS. That school leaders from a number of separate but similarly organised school groupings are studied, makes the case typologically 'multiple' in its configuration, however from Thomas' (2011) discussion of case typologies it is perhaps the 'nested' case study that seems to fit my own research most closely. Thomas suggests that a nested study has elements broken down *'within the principal unit of analysis'* and it *'gains its integrity, its wholeness, from the wider case'* (p517). The principal unit of analysis, or wider case, in my research is the SISS in England and the nested elements are the schools within MATs or TSAs within this system.

The design frame is therefore a multiple, nested case study and because wider conclusions are inferable the analysis is reasoned via abduction (Peirce, 1992; Hammersley, 2007; Thomas, 2010) rather than induction. I use abductive rather than inductive reasoning, as I present explanations or theorisations of what is happening across the nested case, based on close examination of its multiple elements (Hammersley, 2007) and, accessing the theoretical perspectives discussed above, form conclusions as a result. Thomas (2010) presents arguments for the strong links between abductive inference and phronesis (Heidegger, 1997) or 'practical wisdom' (MacIntyre, 1985). I adopt a phronetic analytical position rather than one of claiming theory generation and I aim to add to the knowledge base through abductive phronesis.

Bruner discusses *'hermeneutic composability'* (1991, p8) and emphasises the importance of recognising the nuanced differences in intentions and in comprehensions of stories as told and as heard. My aim here is to harness phronesis in considering the multiple and parallel stories of the school leaders interviewed, to deploy abduction and to engage in what Thomas refers to as *'heuristic and incremental chunking'* (2010, p579) as I explore how school leaders' differing stories relate, form patterns and interweave into a larger narrative. I acknowledge that every participant and every context have unique aspects, that the telling and the hearing of individual narratives is fraught with nuance (Goodson *et al*, 2010; Goodson, 2013) but that the case provides something worthy of study. Via abductive approach I infer school leader experiences as being a consequence of the SISS in which they have become positioned.

4.2 Participant selection, positioning and ethics

4.2.1 Participant selection and sample construction

To avoid the overall 'case' being unhelpfully overly localised, careful consideration was given to the multiple, nested approach taken and therefore, the selection of school groupings from which participants were sought. To allow for differing perspectives and voices per grouping, it was also important to obtain responses from more than one leader per nested group. As further detailed below, my own established relationships with relevant colleagues in the sector played an important part in providing access to MAT CEOs but also in the conducting of the conversational, narrative based interviews.

Accordingly, seven MATs were identified, each with an active relationship with a TSA. These were selected across two government regions with three MATs in one and four in the other. This acknowledged differing regional cultures, histories or influences such as from (the then) Regional Schools Commissioners' (now, Regional Directors') offices. Only small or medium-sized MATs were

chosen to focus the research on a part of the sector that has arguably aimed to retain more localised autonomies. Selection was therefore partly purposive with an arguable convenience element as I had direct access to school leaders within two regions in which I had worked: the West Midlands and the North West.

For participants to be selected, each MAT needed a significant involvement in a TSA. Initially I was looking for MATs where the lead school within the MAT was also a Teaching School, but it quickly became apparent that varying definitions of 'lead school' and of the histories of how both MATs and TSAs had developed, meant that there was some variation in the structural detail of the relationships. In every case a TSA had a lead teaching school as a key school within the chosen MAT or there was an active relationship between the MAT and TSA. This was a design requirement because of my interest in the varying aspects of positioning in and across MATs and TSAs and the similarities as well as differences in each grouping type's purpose, standing and interrelationship. Changing emphases since 2010 in leadership in school-improvement at resolutions beyond the individual school, meant that including TSAs as well as MATs was useful.

Given the above selection criteria, MAT characteristics were analysed using government academy school transparency data (at time of writing, available at DfE, 2022c) and TSAs were identified based on the DfE school-to-school support directory (at time of writing, available at DfE, 2020c). MATs within the targeted regions, of the right size in terms of numbers of schools and which included a key school as a teaching school, were identified using these tools and via further web-based analysis using MAT and TSA websites. MAT Chief Executive Officers were approached directly or via senior colleagues with whom I had some form of existing professional route for communication. They were asked to agree to the following participant involvement from their grouping:

An interview with:

- The MAT Chief Executive Officer and/ or Executive Headteacher/ Principal (these were de facto the same person in all cases but with varying emphases within the job titles adopted)
- A second senior leader within the MAT leadership team (roles and job titles varied but all were in roles that involved them in connecting individual member schools to the overall MAT leadership)
- The Director of Teaching School or a colleague with senior responsibility that linked the TSA to the MAT

Accordingly, there were 21 participants in total, three in each of seven MAT/ TSA groupings with one participant from each of the seven groupings having significant responsibility for the TSA. Interviews were conducted via mutual agreement within the schools in which interviewees were based in all cases except one (which instead, was held in the meeting room of a local hotel). Meeting rooms were arranged by administrators working for the interviewees and in all cases, appropriate privacy and lack of any interruptions were carefully planned for and realised.

Final considerations in identifying the MATs and TSAs included the size, configuration and age, particularly of the MAT. It was decided to select from a range of MATs and associated TSAs in regard to these characteristics but to only choose groupings where the MAT had 15 schools or fewer. For the two government regions, Figures 2 (West Midlands) and 3 (North West) provide an overview of the job roles, gender and number of years holding leadership responsibilities of the 21 selected participants. They also provide detail of the number and age phase breakdown of the academies in each MAT. For each participant a 'Participant Reference' and pseudonym is also identified. For ease of reading the pseudonyms are used when citing participants in chapters 5 and 6.

Figure 2.

Gov't Region	Participant Information						No. of Academies in MAT			
	Role Title (contextual detail in brackets)	**Participant Reference & Pseudnym**	**Gender**	**Profession (Yrs)**	**Senior Leader (Yrs)**	**In This Role (Yrs)**	**Through age**	**Primary**	**Secondary**	**Total**
West Midlands	Executive Principal & Chief Executive Officer (MAT)	01-ExPrin/CEO-WM1 Diane	F	22	16	5	1	4	5	**10**
	Executive Principal Primary (MAT)	02-ExPrin(Pri)-WM1 Maria	F	23	12	3				
	Director of Primary Teaching School (TSA)	03-DirTS(Pri)-WM1 Margaret	F	29	12	1				
West Midlands	Headteacher (MAT CEO) (MAT)	07-HT/CEO-WM3 Kathryn	F	28	24	1	0	0	2	**2**
	Senior Deputy Headteacher (of Lead School) (MAT)	08-SnDHTLdSch-WM3 Natalie	F	21	14	2				
	Director of Teaching School & Alliance SCITT (TSA)	09-DirTS/SCITT-WM3 Anneka	F	19	9	4				
West Midlands	Executive Headteacher (MAT CEO) (MAT)	13-ExHT/CEO-WM5 Angela	F	30	21	3	0	7	0	**7**
	Head of School (of lead school) (MAT)	14-HoSLdSch-WM5 Jodie	F	27	18	2				
	Deputy Head of School (of lead school) (TSA)	15-DHoS/DirTS-WM5 Samera	F	14	2	2				
West Midlands	Chief Executive Officer (MAT)	16-CEO-WM6 Robert	M	23	9	3	0	5	9	**14**
	Headteacher (of lead school) (MAT)	17-HTLdSch-WM6 Nathaniel	M	22	19	3				
	Director of Teaching School (TSA)	18-DirTS-WM6 Charlotte	F	23	20	4				

School Grouping and Participant Characteristics (at conclusion of data collection period) - West Midlands MATs and TSAs

Figure 3.

Gov't Region	Participant Information						No. of Academies in MAT			
	Role Title (contextual detail in brackets)	**Participant Reference**	**Gender**	**Profession (Yrs)**	**Senior Leader (Yrs)**	**In This Role (Yrs)**	**Through age**	**Primary**	**Secondary**	**Total**
North West	Chief Executive Officer (MAT)	04-CEO-NW2 Jill	F	28	15	2	0	0	4	**4**
	Principal (of lead school) (MAT)	05-PrinLdSch-NW2 Michael	M	20	17	1				
	Director of Teaching School (TSA)	06-DirTS-NW2 Georgina	F	29	12	5				
North West	Chief Executive Officer (MAT)	10-CEO-NW4 Leonora	F	29	24	4	0	6	3	**10**
	Headteacher (of lead school) (MAT)	11-HTLdSch-NW4 Clive	M	23	18	2				
	Teaching School Support Officer (Director) (TSA)	12-DirTS-NW4 Seb	M	42	34	4				
North West	Executive Principal (MAT CEO) (MAT)	19-ExPrin/CEO-NW7 Stephen	M	21	13	7	0	1	1	**2**
	Headteacher (of member school) (MAT)	20-HTMembSch-NW7 Siobhan	F	38	28	2				
	Director of Teaching School (TSA)	21-DirTS-NW7 Trevor	M	25	18	2				

School Grouping and Participant Characteristics (at conclusion of data collection period) – North West MATs and TSAs

Three of the MATs (Refs 1, 4 and 6) had 10-14 schools and comprised a mixture of primaries and secondaries, and in one case a through-age school. These were all longer established MATs. Four of the MATs (Refs 2, 3, 5 and 7) were smaller and were more recently formed. MATs 3 and 7 were very new and at the time of the research comprised only two schools. Of the 21 participants, 14 were

female and seven male. Because of constraints on grouping and participant selection there was no attempt to overtly balance or proportionalise the participant sample by gender although it was useful to find that two-thirds of the participants were female and this is discussed further later.

4.2.2 Positioning

Issues of positioning were of particular significance given the study's own focus on this. My own positioning as a researcher is methodologically relevant. The elicitation of honest and reflective responses was seen as more likely given that my own career background positions me proximate to these senior leaders' worlds of work. I worked alongside senior leaders in the school sector during the 'New Labour' period, through the 2010-2015 coalition period and continued to professionally engage with school senior leaders during the Conservative administrations since 2015. I was involved in strategic developments in the sector before and through the period of the 2010 White Paper (DfE, 2010) and Hargreaves' writing of his 'thinkpiece' papers (2010, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b). This contributed to my conscious self-positioning as a researcher likely to be able to engage in informed questioning and discussion based on mutual trust and context awareness. I adopted some of the approaches associated with elite interviewing, for example relating to presenting oneself, gaining trust and managing tone (Harvey, 2011).

Participant positioning was also carefully considered. Two principal issues were identified: how participants felt positioned in relation to me, and therefore how free they felt to respond openly, honestly and with frankness, and; ensuring participants weren't adversely positioned by knowing that their own senior colleagues would be aware that I was interviewing them. The first concern was minimised via consideration of Harvey's (2011) strategies and by adopting Quinney, Dwyer and Chapman's (2016) advice on peer conversation-based interviewing within phenomenological studies and their strategies relating to *'space, language, role and trust'* (p6). Any concerns about positioning against their own work peers were principally tackled by pre-interview provision of participant

information with carefully emphasised assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix 1). In the event I encountered no concerns or evidence of participant inhibitions.

As both Gray (2018) and Schneider (2006) point out there is an intimacy in ethnographic approach. In this study this intimacy exhibited itself through a conversational semi-structured interviewing approach. The conversational style (Campbell, Gold and Lunt, 2003 – and see 4.4 below) meant that rapport was quickly established and seen as a positive design benefit. Any compromise of objectivity and neutrality, as set against depth, detail and nuance, was consistent with my aim for abductive phronesis. I adopted a careful interview schedule design (see Appendix 2) to assist in foregrounding open, informed exploration. This schedule was used carefully with the first grouping of three participants interviewed and then reviewed before further use. Such reflexivity sees researchers' self-reflection on their own engagement in the field and their feelings such that they can *'become part of the data themselves'* (Gray, 2018, p164).

I provided carefully phrased participant information made available prior to data collection (see Appendix 1) and emphasised the desirability of genuine openness and honesty in response. When an interviewee knows that a focus is on how they feel positioned, there is a degree of inevitability that their answers will themselves be part of that positioning. With this in mind, the analysis of the interviews included a reading of responses for indications that answers were subject to such positioning. Also, the conversational interviewing approach itself aimed, via extension questions and prompts to explore and critically re-explore responses in depth and detail.

Given the small number of participants and the purposive approach taken I did not plan specifically for proportionality in selection in terms of, for example, race and gender. 66.6% of participants (14 of 21) were female which was broadly proportional to 2019 national data which shows that 67.3% of headteachers in state funded schools were female (DfE, 2020d). One (4.7%) of my participants, a primary school deputy headteacher was of an ethnic minority group. Nationally, 2016 data showed

that 7% of primary and 9% of secondary headteachers were from ethnic minority backgrounds (DfE, 2018), so the proportion of minority ethnic leaders in my participant group was very slightly lower than the case nationally.

4.2.3 Ethical considerations and approval

Ethical approval was sought and obtained under University of Birmingham processes. Participant information and consent forms (see Appendix 1) were submitted and approved. These included information about anonymity and confidentiality, data security, ethical issues, positionality and the right to withdraw from the research.

The only potential ethical issue identified was that the research involved interviewing participants from related or the same institutions and that it was possible that such participants could be of differing seniority within such institutions and might even be in the same direct line-management structures. However, all interviews were conducted privately and reference to institutions and individuals in written output is wholly anonymised. It was explained that if any potentially sensitive perspectives emerged regarding one participant's professional standing or relationship with another, then anonymity in written output and general or non-specific terminology would be used.

4.3 Methodological and theoretical perspectives

The research object for this study is the perceived positioning of individuals within England's self-improving school system and this means that an interpretivist approach to understanding the *'subjective meaning behind the individual action'* (Grønmo, 2020, p44) best serves my research question. While my research has a strongly phenomenological feel (Schütz, 1967; Husserl, 2012) there are also aspects that adopt hermeneutic principles (Gadamer, 2008). Phenomenologically I am interested in the way that school leaders perceive their own realities and the circumstances in which they find themselves. However, the broader connecting context of seven MATs, each with TSAs

across two government regions, and my own positioned linked history as the researcher in this means that there are strong hermeneutic aspects to my analysis (Dowling, 2007; Van Manen, 2016). As a professional and academic who has worked in the school partnerships field, I bring my own *'preconceptions'* and my own *'holistic understanding'* (Grønmo, 2020, p442) and these have influenced my choices of method: the conversation-based, semi-structured interviewing of purposively selected senior school leaders.

I explore the degree to which senior school leaders' agentic relationships with structure are best explained as social phenomena, are based mainly on the actions of individuals, or are the result of both. Durkheim (1938) emphasised social relations through methodological holism, while Weber (1922) emphasised methodological individualism and the importance of individual action. The more nuanced approach of moderate methodological holism (Garfinkel, 1981; Zahle and Collin, 2014) is perhaps that which I have found most useful. Throughout, I revisit a common structure-agency conundrum: whether individuals form the societal system of schools, are a result of it or, how these inter-relate. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory and his concept of dualism are useful here and in my analysis I draw significantly on his dualist conception of agent relation to structure and structure to agent. These relations beg questions about leader 'position' within a dualist context and, as expanded on in chapter 2, positioning theory, as associated with Rom Harré and his collaborators (Harré *et al,* 2009) and psychosocial and sense-making approaches inform my theorisations of 'position'.

In this research I am also significantly influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977a, 1980) and of Yrjö Engeström (1999, 2009), again substantially discussed in chapter 2. I adopt the ideas of these two sociologists as theoretical perspectives which I apply during my analysis and discussion. However, my methodology is interpretivist, founded in open, discursive questioning and subjective approach and phenomenologically, I only apply Bourdieu's and Engeström's tools and concepts in

helping me explicate the phenomena exhibited, once data collection is complete and analysis is possible. Indeed, an emphasis on capturing and dynamically engaging with narrative in this research, for me, involves what Goodson (2013) calls an *'open'* (p72) approach, reading across the 'scripts' collected and considering within the dynamic reality of the participants' (in the plural) and my own interpretational and changing contexts. Goodson *et al*, (2010) suggest that we need not just learn from the narrative but that we learn *'…in the act of narration and in the ongoing construction of the life story'* (p127).

4.4 Conversational semi-structured interviewing

I collected data using ethnographic or conversational semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979; Campbell, Gold and Lunt, 2003; O'Reilly, 2009). The interviews were semi-structured as I needed them to be more focused engagements than 'unstructured' (Thomas, 2017) or 'evolving' (Newby, 2010) interviews and to cover pre-determined overall themes with a clear end point. Accordingly, I developed a semi-structured interview schedule that allowed for variation in participants' own contexts (see Appendix 2). Semi-structured interviewing allowed the compromise of focused, organised coverage while enabling organic responses.

To explore positioning in depth, allowing examination of the critical relationship that these school leaders had with their context, colleagues and selves, the interview method had to feel peer-to-peer and benefited from being conversational. Mutual trust was critical. King, Horrocks and Brooks (2019) discuss such interviewing as a *'special form of conversation'* (p79) or a *'speech event'* or *'friendly conversation'* (p280) but emphasise the care that must be taken in formulating questions and in avoiding them being over-complex or judgemental. They emphasise the potential for providing a *'social setting for the negotiation of meaning'* (p277). Critical in my design was that I would be analysing aspects of the whole interview conversation (Goodson *et al*, 2010) as, when

interviews are seen in this way, questions for discussion are seen as '*active and constructive and not passive and neutral'* (Potter and Edwards, 1992, p165). The framing of the interview as a conversational encounter acknowledged my participatory, informed position and interactive, informal or naturalistic (Gilbert and Stoneman, 2016) approach. Newby (2010) refers to such interviewing as *'in-depth'* and emphasises that the interviewer's role is not to unwaveringly follow a structure, but *'to stimulate a response'* (p343) demonstrating skill and knowledge in the issue being discussed.

The interview schedule was used with the first MAT/TSA grouping visited and then reviewed. The schedule was designed to allow time and space for structural aspects to be explored while allowing a focus on participants' individual agentic stories as related to such structures. I adopted the approach of *'balanced turn-taking'* (Stage and Mattson, 2003, p102) and was mindful of the need for careful application of the elements of ethnographic approach. King, Horrocks and Brooks (2019) suggest that these should include the interviewer having *'explicit purpose'*, making *'ethnographic explanations'* clear to the participant, even during the interview, as well as posing *'ethnographic questions'* (p280). Such ethnographic questions can include the *'grand tour question'* whereby interrelationships and aspects of linking story are sought as well as *'structural questions'* to elicit how participants organise their knowledge (p280-281). The schedule was kept purposefully simple and straightforward. Details of the principal issues or topics covered and the associated default key questions used to start discussion under each of these, are laid out in Figure 4. Possible follow-up questions as well as example supplementary probes were also included in the full schedule, as detailed in Appendix 2.

Figure 4.

Issue/ Topic	Key Question Starter
Personal background	Can you tell me a little of your background, perhaps leading to how you came into this profession?
Professional background	Can you give some detail of your career?
	When and how did you find yourself progressing towards senior leadership?
	Can you provide detail of your senior leadership positions up to when you took your current role?
Present role	Please will you give me an overview description of your present role?
	What is it that motivates you in this role?
	How much agency or 'freedom' do you have in your role?
Your institution/ network/ grouping	Can you describe <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?
	What do you see as the specific characteristics of <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA>?
	What are the strengths of <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?
	What are the challenges for <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?
	How do you see your institution's responsibilities to 'all' (as relevant) children?
	What are your own main challenges within <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> at present?
	What do you see as the future for <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA>?
Self-improving school system & system leadership	How do you see the <MAT/ TSA> within the idea/ concept of a 'self-improving school system'?
	What is your perspective on the need for a 'middle-tier' in the (largely) post-LA system?
	What are your feelings on where responsibilities for 'provision' lie within the education system?
	To what degree do you feel that people in your 'type' of role have genuine agency within the 'self-improving school system'?
	What are your views on transparency, choice and clarity of the system to staff, parents and pupils?
	How do you see the 'system's' responsibilities to 'all' children?
A return to your own role	Finally, how do you see your role and your career within the emergent and developing 'self-improving school system'?

Detail from Interview Schedule (Issues/topics & Key starter questions)

4.5 Analytic approach

Ethnographic, conversational interview data requires careful reading for nuanced responses from participants. Reflective responses were encouraged via the conversational approach and analysis had to account for the in-depth, two-way nature of the discussion. It can be the case that *'the researcher's questions become just as much a topic of analysis as the interviewee's answers'* (Potter and Edwards, 1992, p165) and my analytical approach acknowledges my own part in co-creating, via conversation, the responses that the participants ultimately proffered.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and in-full. All interviewee and interviewer components of the discussion were captured. This led to raw data in the form of 21 hours and 8 minutes of recorded interviews and 200939 words of transcript. The NVivo analytics programme (QSR International Pty Ltd, 1999-2018) was used to support a constant comparative approach (Glaser, 1965; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014) to the data but no claims are made that the NVivo nodes and daughter-nodes arising provide a definitive view of what the data hold. Instead, the use of the software assisted as a tool within a broader repeated reading of the data, allowing a manageability of organisation and the identification of themes.

Word-processed interview transcripts were entered as 21 participant files into NVivo and a grounded, bottom-up coding approach was used to identify key themes. Drawing on aspects of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) were undertaken, partly using the 'nodes' system in NVivo. Aspects of all three coding stages were adopted, accepting the differing emphases increasingly adopted by Glaser (1992) on the one hand and Strauss (1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) on the other. Strauss' (1987) view that the coding paradigm should be founded on selection of categories is particularly useful in my analytic approach and although there is much discussion of whether selective coding can ultimately lead the researcher

to one core category as Strauss suggests, my research ultimately aims at this. Strauss and Corbin see selective coding as the:

> *'…process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.'* (1990, p.116)

My interpretation of selective coding was based on this and I determined to provide a final summary category or statement that identified the nexus of my findings. My approach to coding was, therefore, as follows:

Open coding: Using the software, data was open coded into 32 general thematic areas (NVivo nodes), or parent codes (see Appendix 3). In total these contained 305 more specific sub-themes (NVivo daughter-nodes), or daughter codes (see Appendix 4). Ultimately the 32 parent codes proved useful only as an initial organisational mechanism and were not used for the axial coding. Illustrative examples of how transcript references were coded are available in Appendix 5.

Axial coding stage 1: New key themes were identified by focusing only on the 64 daughter codes that have at least 15 references attributed to them from the participant transcripts. These daughter codes were read and re-read and slowly sorted into 10 new key themes (see Appendices 6 and 7).

Axial coding stage 2: A second stage of axial coding proved to be necessary whereby the references within the daughter codes were re-examined from within the framing of their newly attributed key themes. For each of the 10 key themes, specific findings then emerged and the titling of the 10 key themes was edited to reflect the more precise meanings elicited (see section 4.7 and chapters 5 and 6). Specific findings are presented using indicative direct quotations from the data.

Selective coding: The 10 key themes provide a selective 'take' from the data as a whole and enabled a curated selection of deeper themes based on the daughter codes and the references attributed to them. Ultimately and following a period of reflective reconsideration of what these 10 key themes and the detailed material contributing to them tell us, a small number of core findings became apparent (see chapter 7) which have fundamental resonance, in differing ways, across all of the 10 key themes.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) discuss grounded theory researchers as having to use theoretical sensitivity, or *'the ability to recognize what is important in data and to give it meaning'* (p46). This is critical in identifying themes that link and relate to the *'central phenomenon that needs to be theorized about'* (Sarker, Lau and Sahay, 2001, p40). Unsurprisingly, the key themes reflect to a greater degree the interview schedule used, but they are useful in placing a lens on the overall agentic and structural landscapes being explored by this study. Ultimately of critical importance in my findings were the daughter codes themselves and the lengthy process of repeated return, through them, to participants' original narratives.

4.6 Critical evaluation of method and analytical approach

Conversational, ethnographic semi-structured interviewing worked well. Participant accounts of their experience of the SISS were openly explored and at no point was it felt that they were guarded or lacked openness in their responses. Each interview produced a pleasingly rich response because of the conversational approach which was largely successful in *'shifting the focus from data gathering to data generation'* (Viruru and Cannella, 2006).

Because of the depth of analysis required of each transcript, the fact that seven MAT-TSA groupings were accessed, and 21 individual participants interviewed, proved effective as a research design in garnering rich data. I had some reservations that three of the groupings were based on small,

relatively newly formed MATs, albeit with substantive links to established TSAs. This meant that some of the internal relationships and positioning exhibited differently in these groups to the way they appeared in others, but useful, intimately related experiences and reflections came from these participants, who had considered particularly carefully their own and their organisation's MAT or TSA involvement. That three of the school groupings were from one region and four from another proved less relevant than originally envisaged. It perhaps enabled a broader range of stories and experiences to emerge and demonstrated how similar structural and agentic issues exhibit themselves across and beyond regions. Region-specific examples of response did emerge but the greater lesson from interviewing across the two regions was a lack of obvious differences.

Analytically, axial and selective coding was conducted using data arranged in NVivo but ultimately, handled outside the software. This provided opportunity for thematic emergence (Glaser, 1992), consolidation and reconsideration. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p101) assert that both *'properties and dimensions'* are discoverable in data, although Glaser rejects this (Walker and Myrick, 2006), arguing that the dimensions attributable to a concept are difficult to ascertain in grounded theory. NVivo offered my research a tool to identify a degree of dimension to ideas or concepts emergent, but I quickly became concerned that moving beyond a simple weighted identification of properties was necessary. Ultimately, the move from the original parent codes back to the daughter codes during axial coding allowed an effective identification of deeper themes that ran across the participants and contexts. This allowed a well-founded selective coding stage that has resulted in what I argue to be a secure response to the research question and ultimately, hopefully, some revealing findings.

4.7 How the findings are presented.

The findings are presented in two chapters, each with two sub-sections:

Chapter 5: Agency within, across and over the SISS

comprising:

- 5.1: School leaders' agentic experiences in the school system
- 5.2: School leader career stories, rationales and perspectives on their futures

Chapter 6: Structural mutability and school leader positioning

comprising:

- 6.1: Organisational sense-making by school leaders
- 6.2: School leader sense-making about the wider school system

Ten key thematic areas emerged through the first stage of axial coding and these are each discussed with inclusion of illustrative direct quotes from participant transcripts, either in chapter 5 or in chapter 6. These key thematic areas are as follows:

- 5.1.1: The complex realities of individual school leader agency
- 5.1.2: Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence
- 5.2.1: Career story as a rationale for leaders' current positioning
- 5.2.2: The SISS and career rationale
- 5.2.3: Leaders' perspectives on their futures

and

- 6.1.1: Leadership in complex MAT- TSA structures
- 6.1.2: Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
- 6.2.1: Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
- 6.2.2: Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of system maturity

- 6.2.3: Fragility and the integrity of the system

The ten key thematic areas are taken one at a time through chapters 5 and 6 with specific findings presented under separate subtitles as they emerged during the second stage of axial coding. Each of these is discussed with reference to literature and aspects of the theoretical perspectives offered by Bourdieu and Activity Theory, as introduced in section 2.2. Appendix 6 tabulates the ten key themes that emerged through axial coding and how the 64 daughter codes with 15 or more references attributed to them contributed to the identification of these themes. Appendix 7 provides this information in tabulated form for each key theme.

5 AGENCY WITHIN, ACROSS AND OVER THE SISS

This chapter is split into two sections, taking agency rather than structure as the starting point. The first section collates findings concerned with school leader agentic experience and focuses both on the lived complexities of receiving agency themselves and on providing it to others. The second section focuses in on career stories, rationales for them, leaders' thoughts about their futures and on how motivations play their part in this. The second part therefore aims to further exemplify or provide greater exploration of how leader agency is felt by them personally in the complex environments of the SISS. Chapter 6, which follows, turns the focus the other way around and returns to ideas of sense-making and positioning – as introduced in this current chapter – but from leaders' perspectives on and about the structures they work within.

Throughout this chapter and chapter 6, I cite participants for whom I share some limited demographic detail in Figures 2 and 3 in section 4.2.1. There is also a brief pen-portrait of each participant in Appendix 8. Throughout, participant names cited are pseudonyms.

5.1 School leaders' agentic experiences in the school system

This initial area of findings is concerned with how agency experienced can be different to that expected. Here the findings detail how individuals' positioning is complex and how sense-making attempts are evidenced in leaders' responses. Agentic compromise is a key focus in the findings discussed here. There are two groupings of findings here: firstly, focusing in on and curating the complexities leaders experience themselves at the school and beyond-school levels and secondly looking how leaders feel they can provide agency to others. Each of these two groupings are further sub divided into specific themes from the data.

5.1.1 The complex realities of individual school leader agency

School leader agency is complex, multifarious and often opaque. In this first section, leaders' agentic freedoms and power are explored within the SISS context of MAT schools and TSAs. Bourdieu suggests that, with experience, acquired capital can be more effectively applied to better understood fields by agents benefitting from richer habitus (1979a, 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). For my participants however, opportunities to exercise agency were often misrecognised, symbolic violence was sometimes evident and strategies of game-playing compromise were common. I explore here, how leaders made sense of their positions and contexts, within their own schools and across and beyond their trusts and alliances and how experience informed such game-playing, enabling the exercise of agency.

5.1.1.1 ***Sense-making: individual agency at the school level***

Participants emphasised agency in their own leadership. However, this was typically qualified with examples of restrictions on such agency. Such limitations were often explained by reference to MAT vision, ethos or values. Limitations to personal agency were often, initially downplayed as in the case with Clive, an experienced headteacher within a growing MAT:

> *'So I do run the school the way I would want to see it run but with an eye on the values and the vision of the Trust itself… but in the main it's how we would want to run it as a leadership team and there are some things that we do which are Trust-centric but in the main it's our school…'* (Clive)

Clive continued with another theme often observable in responses, that their Trust was not heavily centralised: *'…it's not an* (well-known national 'chain') *model, same colour-pallet job'*. Maria, the Executive Primary Principal within another MAT was quick to emphasise: *'I'm able to make change within our organisation… I'm not able to make national change.'* (Maria)

This comment was offered as though the ability to make *'change within our organisation'* was in some way a gift rather than a given. Siobhan was less guarded about her estimation of her own agency. As the headteacher of a small rural primary school in a two-school MAT run by a large secondary, she used a different rationale for her surrender of leadership powers, that by relinquishing certain responsibilities she could focus on what was personally important to her:

> *'I still have a say in what the actual policies are and whether we agree to them, whether we want something changed, but the bulk of that work is now done for me but I don't have to use my Head-time in doing that policy-making.'* (Siobhan)

Importantly, school leaders found ways of accepting their positioning, with agency as somehow a desirable 'given' within the system that should be celebrated, but with necessary and laudable restrictions to such agency. Maria encapsulated this in a very telling phrase:

> *'I feel I've got complete autonomy but I'm quality assured… but I'm happy to be quality assured.'* (Maria)

Defining misrecognition, Bourdieu observes that a player can have an inner understanding that they are misrecognising a situation but ignore this and even convince themselves of a false reality (Bourdieu 1979a, 2000; James 2015). High levels of leadership agency were commonly envisioned as a feature of the SISS, as a form of gift by government to the school or by MATs to individual leaders. However, participant responses suggested that individual leaders had aspects of their agency significantly restricted:

> *'We are all unique schools… And do we do collaboration... yes we do. Do we have a common teaching and learning policy… yes we do. But the way the Trust has… set up its policies is a Part 1 policy which is the overarching policy and then Part 2 is bespoke to the schools…'* (Clive)

Margaret, Director of Teaching School in the same Trust as Maria observed:

> *'I mean obviously anything that's done needs to fit within the* (name of MAT) *ethos… really, but yes, I mean, I'm pretty autonomous… but… we need to work with the… MAT and, you know you can't go completely maverick on these things can you?'* (Margaret)

There may be hints of symbolic violence inherent within a system that seems to promise one thing but perhaps obscures the reality that the opposite might be the case. Ultimately, participants demonstrated compromises in which their own positions were contextualised by environments in which autonomy and control co-existed.

*5.1.1.2 **Sense-making: individual agency beyond the school level***

Another aspect of leaders' agency was noted in relation to their work across groupings, especially beyond their own MATs and TSAs. Jill, a MAT CEO, who had long-standing personal investment in her own MAT lead school, was clear that the senior leaders' principal responsibility is to their own schools. However, she recognised that this can be counter to expectations regarding system self-improvement:

> *'I… spoke at two or three conferences in eleven years… you get asked plenty, you get asked to this, that and the other but I couldn't live with myself if I'd been out doing these things and* (name of MAT lead school) *was plummeting.'* (Jill)

The counter view came from Leonora, a CEO whose MAT had sponsored re-brokered schools:

> *'… I've supported lots of people… I've worked over in the north east… I've worked for the RSC talking about how you establish Trusts, how you can build them, what you can do… if my job was just my Trust then actually I'm not making the impact I could have…'* (Leonora)

Complex, differing habitus and individual choices over investment of professional capital in differently conceived fields of activity (Lewin, 1951; Bourdieu 1990) or *'realms of endeavour'* (Martin, 2003, p23), variably determined how leaders actualised their agency. Jill, above, came from a two-school MAT with very cautious plans for growth. Leonora led a MAT of ten schools that was actively growing, accepting a re-brokered academy from a failed MAT and looking to take additional new academies. The positions of these leaders inevitably reflect these contexts, their attendant histories and habitus and the contradictions that can be expected when leaders work across complex, overlapping fields (Bourdieu, 1989).

*5.1.1.3 **Experience and compromise***

Although competitive systems that are reliant on change might be expected to advantage dynamic, possibly younger, fast-promoted leaders, responses showed that in smaller, more cautious Trusts experience was demonstrably important in enabling agency. Kathryn, as a MAT CEO with 28 years in senior leadership, discussed these challenges:

> *'…one of the luxuries of being long service is you have belief from people around you, but I think the funding, particularly last year and this year has become a major limiting factor… All of the time. I am profoundly tired of thinking, can we afford this? Can we do this?'* (Kathryn)

Trevor, who had been in senior leadership for nearly 20 years, was representative of several experienced TSA leaders:

> *'I've got this experience that I can… say to them, "Listen, I've got three key hunches here about X, Y and Z. I think we should only go with one, which could be achievable, not three that we can't achieve."'* (Trevor)

Of relevance in the responses, however, was how counter-agentic forces were being visited on schools: regulatory, educational outcome and especially, financial efficiency expectations handed down by government. This paradox is seemingly borne of the neoliberal approach to the schooling system, with individual agency seen by leaders as a fundamental and necessary promise but with central government imposing a culture of accountability. This said, Diane, who has significantly developed a complex, successful MAT, discussed managing these pressures:

> *'…it's always about knowing your school. I think you get greater agency if you accept the accountability and you can have those really precise conversations about why it is you can continue to make those decisions.'* (Diane)

Kathryn, a CEO already cited above, talked at length about the constraints on the school's and her own sense of agency because of the increasingly tight funding formula for academy schools and particularly for smaller trusts, where advantage might not be so easily accessed through unpredictable government incentives. She spoke of the weight of responsibility resulting from diminished choices and agency:

> *'In practical terms, the funding has massively limited what I can do on a bigger scale. It's been very much, the last 6 years, about hunkering down and getting through. I mean, at the moment… the school is 11% below the national funding baseline, and I think that has had a very profound effect because at that point, as head, you have to carry the school and carry the ethos and carry the culture and carry peoples' positivity.'* (Kathryn)

Engeström (1999) highlights the contradictions that are inevitably at play within complex systems, but it is Bourdieu, with his emphases on social and cultural capitals and knowing your own field, living your own habitus, who best offers us the tools to understand these complex school leader positions of structure-subject and authority-individual compromise (Bourdieu 1979a; Sulkunen

1982). The symbolically and culturally created power contexts that Bourdieu would see school leaders inhabiting, can be seen as constantly re-legitimised through the interplay of leader agency and system structure (Bourdieu, 1979a; Wacquant, 2005). Such habitus for school leaders is founded on the compromises required to be successful within an effective school and group of schools.

5.1.1.4 Conclusions: The complex realities of individual school leader agency

The deeper problematic here is concerned with agentic power (Bourdieu 1979a; Wacquant 2005; Navarro 2006) and with the contradiction between local freedom to act, as against the requirements of a performative, accountability-based approach. In slight contrast to Foucault's view of power being a wholly ubiquitous phenomenon (Foucault 2004; Ball 2013), Bourdieu emphasises its specifically social and cultural roots. He sees it as constantly re-legitimised through a never-ending interplay of agency and structure and imbued within each agent's own habitus (Navarro 2006). Leaders interviewed in this study evidenced a contradictory citing of agentic power tempered by accepted examples of limitation of that agency. Such positions of justified compromise can suggest Bourdieuian misrecognition (James, 2015) evidencing the development of personal sense-making rationales via which leaders explained their own positioning.

Experience enriches leaders' perspectives on their school or grouping and enables realism about their own changing roles, of accountability culture and what this can mean for their own positioning. While opportunities arise to work beyond traditional school roles for some, such expanded habitus is counterbalanced for others with concomitant restrictions in agency. This reflects the differing positionings of SISS leaders as either positioning themselves or allowing themselves to be positioned (Davies and Harré, 1990).

5.1.2 Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence

How leaders enacted their responsibilities to others proved important. Executive Heads, CEOs,

Directors of Teaching School and similar role holders inhabit positions prone to varied definition and interpretation (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017; Hughes, 2020), but all participants evidenced a seriousness in how they discharged their own agency in enabling other colleagues. Principles of collegiality, mutuality, joint learning and responsibility for improvement through supporting colleague development were common. However, there was a measured response about parental interest and investment in MATs, with a view expressed that parents needed some understanding (Male and Palaiologou, 2022) but that, so long as things were stable and running well at the school level, parents were not otherwise concerned. Senior leaders were keen to emphasise their responsibilities regarding equitable educational provision in the wider community but with a tendency to foreground their own MAT's role in this as against the reported aspirations of competitor MATs.

5.1.2.1 Encouragement and empowerment of colleagues

There was emphasis by senior leaders on the enablement of agency in leaders 'below' them. This particularly manifested itself in how Executive Heads or MAT CEOs saw their responsibilities to Headteachers or Heads of Schools in MAT member schools:

> *'I think people grow when you give them that chance to be stretched and you know… I see my role… as creating an environment for everybody to achieve which means empowering your senior leaders to do their job...'* (Jill)

A form of invisible contract seemed to exist, whereby agency was enabled in response to member schools 'playing of the game'. Georgina, who had worked in university and broader partnership contexts illustrated her approach to supporting her colleagues' autonomy colleagues:

> *'We say that's it's about autonomy with support. We're not going to come and tell you how to run your school and what uniforms to wear… and you're not going to walk into MAT schools and they're all going to look like W.H. Smith, everybody looks the same.'* (Georgina)

Interestingly, individual MAT heads and TSA directors reliant on particular MATs clearly understood this power gradient and associated rules. They emphasised where autonomy was available to them and presented examples of positive benefits. In Siobhan's small primary school that had recently joined a local secondary in a two-school MAT:

> *'There was, initially… particularly over finance… how much is the Executive School going to be taking off you, top-slicing as did the County? But we've been lucky… two of our Governing Body including myself… now sit on the Directors Board… so I feel that we haven't lost that autonomy, we've actually possibly gained a little bit more because we actually have a say within the whole…'* (Siobhan)

This theme of responsibility to empower and of the receipt of such empowerment returns us to Bourdieu's (1977a, 1980) ideas of gift-exchange. There are suggestions of misrecognition (Bourdieu, 2000; James, 2015) by the above small-school primary headteacher who talked about coming to realise that she had sacrificed some power to the large secondary leading their two school MAT. Diane, an experienced CEO of a large MAT, spoke of her own professional learning and growth and the support she received in challenging circumstances from her predecessor:

> *'…she would say, 'I think we can get there through this' and… So I literally would phone and she would come over, regularly, and it would be a list of things… 'right, I've got this, I've got that' …'* (Diane)

Angela, a CEO with strongly evidenced loyalty from her two colleagues, also interviewed by me, spoke of supporting colleagues undertaking school improvement as the MAT and its associated TSA supported newly accepted schools. She emphasised approaches such as coaching and the provision of headteachers with carefully managed opportunities to realise their own mistakes and successes:

'You become more of a coach and an outside eye to support self-review and yet spend some time doing quite big pieces of work, but they don't need you as much and therefore you have time to invest in the next school. They're driving themselves now, they're autonomous. They have that internal capacity.' (Angela)

Such approach was encountered in differing contexts on several occasions and reflects dynamics within such complex systems and the importance of organisational agentic cultures. The MATs and TSAs in this research tended to adopt strategies of jointly owned approach and cooperation but also nuanced approaches to developing self-sustaining leadership from within. Certainly, a commitment common to many of the participants was to the support and development of middle and senior leaders within their groupings, including advancement within and promotional moves beyond their organisations. This is summed up by Leonora:

'…what we've done is build capacity in our Trust to have these great people within them, so we've got capacity to support moving on.' (Leonora)

5.1.2.2 ***Moral duty and responsibility to community***

Bourdieu's idea of field is useful in explaining leaders' actions within collaborative work. The social and cultural capital and habitus that each brings to play in jointly defined MAT or TSA fields results in joint investment, moral alignments and close collegial engagement. As a CEO, Angela was clear about her Trust's and Teaching School's responsibilities:

'…if we've taken a school into our Trust; if we haven't impacted on the children and the provision in a term, what are we doing? We are tasked as the lead school, to provide school improvement. And so, if we're not doing it. We're not getting our remit right, are we? ...And actually, if we haven't got the measure of that value we shouldn't have had them in the first place.' (Angela)

Jodie, from the same Trust, saw this as a moral duty which might involve a school joining the MAT but alternatively, might simply involve their TSA in working alongside non-TSA schools that bought their services:

> *'…that's what our moral purpose is about. But we don't just go out to help schools so they come into the MAT because I can name you ten, eleven schools that we've done…'* (Jodie)

Jill was defensive of schools within the same town, wanting the best for them, which she clearly saw as avoiding being absorbed by national or regional chains. This was echoed across more than one of the groupings: that responsibility could have a geographical or community focus:

> *'I want to prevent predatory change coming into this area. I want this area to have its own solution for its own children. Because I know that* (a trans-regional chain) *has been putting a lot of pressure on another local school and I want us to do this… we are the* (local town) *schools… we want to do this for our children.'* (Jill)

There was a desire by leaders that parents understand the benefits of the MAT or TSA, for example as a CEO, Jill was preparing to meet with parents from a school likely to come into her MAT saying:

> *'I think that's my job to make sure that there's a consistent message going out and that it's clear and simple.'* (Jill)

Similarly, as a CEO who had engaged with several schools entering her Trust, Leonora recognised the need for communication with children's parents:

> *'I will be standing in front of every parent making it very clear what I'm about and where we're going…'* (Leonora)

However, as Natalie, who had a particularly operational role in liaising with parents in her Trust's lead school made clear, parents' interest in Trust structure was limited, partly because of the degree to which many parents do not have real choice in their children's school:

> *'I don't think parents particularly have a choice. I think… you live where you live, you afford what you can afford…'* (Natalie)

Amongst several of the leaders interviewed there was a pragmatic view that counters one of the common neoliberally located defences of the SISS, that with competition also comes choice. An assumed position, that parentally visible leadership should be first and foremost focused on quality of education and less upon explaining organisational context, was common:

> *'…it doesn't matter if a parent understands the Trust or not… the most important thing to that parent is the experience of their child in that individual school… I'm not sure the parent needs to understand… And when we've talked to parents about the Trust they've not been that interested…'* (Diane)

Moral duty was identifiable in what leaders communicated about mission and purpose for their school groupings, particularly in relation to the local community. There seemed to be pragmatism however, over communication with pupils' parents about their understanding of schooling arrangements. Deployment of agency is seemingly variable, with this determined according to those who the leader is seeking to influence.

*5.1.2.3 **Conclusions: Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence***

A sense of propriety often seemed to accompany responsibility and was detectable amongst participants towards their broader geographical context, their school grouping and to leadership team members. Repeated themes of caring, enabling leadership but with clear expectations,

reflected notions of collegiality, shared vision, distributed responsibility and authenticity in style. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's ideas of gift-exchange (1977a, 1985) and Burawoy's (2018) interpretation of these, highlight how power can be discharged via symbolic domination and how this can be masked by sometimes-misrecognised regimes of collegiality and team-playing. There may be misrecognition on behalf of both leaders and followers here. As Gardiner (2011) reminds us, definitions of authentic leadership can ignore power inequities and organisational biases with, as Eagly and Carli (2007) and Edge, Galdames and Horton (2022) point out, complexities such as gender inequity being easily overlooked.

The theme of moral purpose and duty re-emerges when the focus is on the enablement of agency in others and on 'duty' to improve schools. Hargreaves' focus on *'collective moral purpose'* (2012b, p17) and the emphasis on this in government policy rhetoric echoes in the citing of moral duty in rationalising leadership approach. Moral duty, attendant on the enablement of agency via authentic and distributive leadership, provides a permitting circumstance for gift-exchange, game playing (Bourdieu 1979a, 1980; Martin and Gregg, 2012; Burawoy, 2018) and benign, often misrecognised, but very real expression of power.

Juxtaposed with this, however, are participants' pragmatic positions on parental investment in and awareness of schools within their MATs and TSAs. Ultimately this raises the problem of whether policy claims about parental choice are, for many parents at least, over-emphasised (Trowler, 2003; Apple, 2006; Burgess *et al*, 2006). School leaders recognise their school-led system responsibilities but adopt realistic positions on where to prioritise key effort.

5.1.3 Closing notes: School leaders' agentic experiences in the school system

In this first of two sections on agency I have exposed some of the complexities of leadership within a school system under significant readjustment and raised questions about both the enablement of

and limitations on individual leader agency in this context. The complex habitus brought and further enacted by leaders navigating the SISS has come to the fore with rationales such as moral duty and empowerment individually reinterpreted via their own sense-making and resultant career story compromises. These compromises suggest hysteresis among leaders readjusting habitus to changing fields (Bourdieu, 1996a, 2000) via, for example, responding to accountability requirements or career opportunities received or provided. Misrecognition (Bourdieu, 2000) has emerged as a phenomenon, with leaders explaining aspects of their career stories in expansively transformative circumstances via sense-making strategies which, in conversation, evidence sometimes imperceptible symbolic violences via gift exchange. Siobhan's relationship as a primary headteacher with the MAT her school has joined can be argued to illustrate this.

Having presented findings relating to how these leaders' agency manifests itself within the SISS context, I now focus on activity system historicity by considering leaders' career stories, their motivations and perspectives on their futures. Leaders' own rationales for their positioning within MATs and TSAs will return us to questions of moral stance, equitability and compromise.

5.2 School leader career stories, rationales and perspectives on their futures

I now explore a theme that emerged strongly, that of the seeming importance to leaders of a coherent career story in providing them with a rationale for their positioning. In this a particular emphasis emerged on networking and working across or beyond schools. These themes relate closely to a series of findings linked to leader motivation, with values and moral stance proving of recurrent importance and reflections on public service leadership and leadership for equitability proving important. Compromise, often linked to questions about a competitive context, will again emerge as important and towards the end of this section, becomes detectable as uneasy stoicism and even scepticism as leaders discuss their futures and those of the systems they have in many

cases, helped to construct. Loyalties to past endeavours and investments made provide a thought-provoking perspective. Three groupings of findings are detailed here: leaders' career stories as rationales for their positioning, their associated motivations and their perspectives on the future.

5.2.1 Career story as a rationale for leaders' current positioning

Sharing of individual career stories was encouraged through the design of the interview schedule, but the degree to which participants chose to emphasise their personal stories, early motivations, accomplishments and key career milestones was revealing. I found that school leaders explained their decisions via forms of career logic. Leader role habitus and their inhabiting of changing fields was reflected in their need to sense-make, for example in decisions about moving from LA schools to MATs. Participants almost all emphasised collaborative and beyond-own-school working as important in early leadership experiences. There were repeated references to early leadership role models and some placed particular emphasis on having entered school sector leadership from other, earlier career fields.

*5.2.1.1 **Early career experiences***

Participants enthused about early moves into leadership roles and the importance of such early career experiences. Even in the early years of several participants' careers, roles such as Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) typically led to significant leadership experiences, often quite quickly across several employments:

> *'I worked at that secondary school for 5 years and in the time there became an Advanced Skills Teacher, for special educational needs… a SENCO and I opened and ran the first Learning Support Unit for behaviour for* (name of LA) *local authority.'* (Natalie)

Several participants pointed to realising leadership responsibilities even during their Newly (NQT) and Recently (RQT) Qualified Teacher years:

> *'So in my first year of teaching I had responsibility for post-16 teaching, which was great.'* (Maria)

Additionally, almost all participants chose to emphasise the key influences on their own careers of certain senior leaders:

> *'I had… amazing role models as an NQT, an RQT and as a new leader. And had a lot of leadership opportunity in the Inner-city schools I'd worked.'* (Angela)

> *'I had a very supportive Head while I was there who sort of was trying to push me in the direction of leadership.'* (Siobhan)

Bourdieuian gift exchange often involved early symbolic capital reward (Bourdieu, 1977a; 1980) including career building enabled by outward-looking, collaborative senior leaders who were developing larger and more complex fields of activity and influence. Samera was originally appointed as an NQT at the school at which she is now Director of Teaching School and Deputy Head and, having been a professional musician, Maria was offered advancement to Head of Music at an early point:

> *'…I felt very humbled and honoured to even be considered for… I would never put myself in that position.'* (Samera)

> *'And he made a promise to me, and he said 'if you do it for twelve months… I'll fast-track you'. Well I actually wasn't interested in being fast-tracked… but he kept his word.'* (Maria)

Some participants reported being manoeuvred into accepting responsibilities early in their leadership careers. Bourdieu's *'paradox of doxa'* (2001, p1) explores the perpetuation of established orders via misrecognised freedoms and power gradients. Participants like Nathaniel, now the Head of a MAT lead school, supported the organisational growth of his school by embracing early opportunity to be a part of expansive transformation (Engeström, 1999; 2001):

> *'So that was when I felt that nationally, the school was at the forefront of that. We were the vanguard of lots of those things and I was asked to head that up.'* (Nathaniel)

Clive similarly talked of early opportunity:

> *'…and in that role,* (name of TS Head) *had us in a team of 7 or 8 ASTs…* (and)*… was one of the first people to become a National Support School… just quite visionary.'* (Clive)

Symbolic capital acquisition was common when these early career professionals were establishing themselves within their fields. However, several participants put particular emphasis on how leaders identified opportunities for them at an early stage. In celebrating the qualities of formative employer leaders, participants were perhaps explaining and validating their own early acceptance of opportunity. The power dynamics operating within senior leaders' early career fields reflect how they accrue capital and develop habitus via social processes (Navarro, 2006) and how this acquisition is neither by purely structural determinations nor via free will but often via forms of misrecognition (Bourdieu, 1979a).

*5.2.1.2 **Early collaborative experiences***

As Clive clearly indicated, opportunities to work beyond their own school, to collaborate with and to impact upon other schools, were important within early career stories:

> *'…that whole side of school improvement, going out to other schools, working with*

mentoring, coaching of other colleagues to improve their practice was the best thing I ever did.' (Clive)

Indeed, participants demonstrated specific commitments to collaborative, beyond-own-school working early in their careers by planning for collaborative creation of expansive outcomes (Engeström, 1999) as they influenced their early professional fields (Bourdieu, 1980). For Michael, who made an internal move to a headship role, vacated by Jill when she became MAT CEO, this was certainly the case:

'So I came as an Assistant Head and set-up the Training School which this school had just got… the Training School specialism… alongside Language College and Technology College, and (name of TS Head) *appointed me to set-up the Training School specialism…'* (Michael)

Also, a feature of participants' responses was an emphasis on how such early collaborative opportunity fuelled them in enhancing practice in their own schools:

'…the Head said 'I'd like you to lead on the National Strategy in this school'… it gave me a good framework to begin to think about blanket teaching and learning strategies you could use in the school in order to move teaching incrementally forward…' (Diane)

Some participants had professional roles in other sectors before entering the teaching profession and tended to emphasise this with the clear intimation that early importation of experience had positively impacted on their trajectory towards becoming senior school-sector leaders. Anneka, as a TSA Director who had been an area manager in retail, was clear about how her career background had contributed:

'…I gave it all up and went and did a PGCE… I did business studies and IT. Went to my first school, was a business studies teacher. Twelve months later, I was Head of Business Studies.

Six months after that I was Head of Business Studies and an Assistant Head for a year group.' (Anneka)

An Executive Principal, Stephen, who had started a two-school MAT moved into teaching from science laboratory work and emphasised that this was to do with an early search for a more fulfilling career:

'Working in labs was not something that really switched me on in the pharmaceutical industry. So I looked to go back to Oxford, where I did a PGCE and moved on from there into employment, into a job, into teaching.' (Stephen)

Maria, who had come from an earlier career as a professional musician explained:

'I decided to do PGCE whilst working out what I was going to do with my life and I very quickly fell in love with teaching, being in the classroom teaching my subject…' (Maria)

For Natalie, an early career path alteration came from within the profession, with a change of age-phase:

'I worked within the primary sector for 2 years… from there I got my first promotion… to work in secondary education… as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Co-ordinator for a large secondary school, because of the work I'd done with particularly disadvantaged children from an ethnic background in the primary school.' (Natalie)

Several participants worked hard in accruing social and symbolic capital and increasingly complex collaborative opportunities. A proportion of them clearly valued the experiences provided by beyond-own-school opportunities and early career complexities. That these participants capitalised on such field alterations and complex histories perhaps makes them suited to handling contradictions and steering expansive transformations within their trusts and alliances. They may have benefitted

from deployment of game-playing advantage and their gifting to new leadership contexts of their previously accrued experiences (Powers, 2002; Nielsen, 2016) and expanding habitus.

*5.2.1.3 **Conclusions: Career story as a rationale for leaders' current positioning.***

Career stories arguably involve game-playing for reward and can involve colleagues accepting new senior leadership agendas as *'natural, self-evident, and legitimate'* (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008, p31). A strong sense-making rationale was identifiable within these senior leaders who rejected suggestions that they had changed course unknowingly or unwittingly (Ganon-Shilon and Schechter, 2016; Spillane and Anderson, 2014), contending that working in their present MAT or TSA context had a logic. Participants communicated a sense of their changing habitus as they connected career decisions to the fields in which they have worked. Bourdieu's (1996a) concept of hysteresis, whereby the habituses associated with past success and necessary for current success contradict or dislocate with each other (Hardy, 2008; Courtney, 2017) and where field-habitus mismatch becomes problematic (Graham, 2020; Strand and Lizardo, 2017), may affect leader positioning, here. Courtney argues that such hysteresis is the intention of government as it intentionally manipulates an educational field inhabited by contradiction to *'deprivilege welfarist leaders'* (2017, p1054). Although my participants, seemed to evidence self-determination as they made sense of their career stories, the power dynamics and gradients of career building (Gunter and Thomson, 2010) were clearly identifiable. Subtle misrecognitions about positioning, throughout school leader's careers, may be a relevant facet of individual career stories (Ozga, 2000; Pajak and Green, 2003).

5.2.2 The SISS and career rationale

A recurrent theme was that senior leaders provided rationales for MATs and TSAs via shared values and a moral stance. These typically included:

- a shared vision that to them had a degree of uniqueness.

- children and young learners at the centre of their joint endeavour while valuing communities and colleagues.
- a sense of public service.
- equitability in educational provision.

A moral imperative and public service rationale (Tomlinson, 1986; Ball, 2017) genuinely seemed for many, to mean doing the right thing for their own community and their own learners, but also across the MAT or TSA team and where relevant, beyond this. However, compromise was a recurrent reality in rationales, with current imperatives often conflicting with the historicity of professional memory.

*5.2.2.1 **Rationales, values and moral stance***

Leaders' values and moral positioning proved an important theme in the findings, often being captured in internal discourses including school and Trust policy. Jill, for example, described the values agreed between her team of headteachers:

> *'…our values as Heads are reciprocity, generosity, openness and honesty and humility. So giving to each other, being generous, being open, being honest, supporting each other to do even better for the young people.'* (Jill)

Clive spoke of leader values within the SISS extending beyond individual MATs or TSAs. Here he discusses a secondary school collaborative that was across his county:

> *'I think you have to stay morally as a good guy and I know this sounds quite odd but while we're part of the MAT we highly value the overall secondary school collaborative… Because… you've got to be able to sleep at night.'* (Clive)

Having children and young people at the centre of a values approach was a noticeable theme. Robert, who led a well-known Trust and TSA and who had held a national system leader position, spoke of a *'Venn diagram'* with the *'business of education'* and *'education as a business'* intersecting, but where:

> *'…if you find yourselves having discussions that have nothing to do with the children, you shouldn't be talking about it in the first place.'* (Robert)

Kathryn, as an experienced female MAT CEO with nearly 25 years of executive leadership experience, described an increasing passion for developing future female leaders among her own students and personal expressions of value-driven leadership, such as this, were not unusual:

> *'There's a complete joy about working with teenagers. I think they are just magnificent in all their many complications and I think more recently I've felt that I feel pretty passionate about perhaps role modelling for girls and women.'* (Kathryn)

Moral purpose, when referred to in connection with values, could expose an interesting contradiction. For some, the principal emphasis was on doing the best for the leader's own grouping, for others there was a vision beyond the organisation. Georgina, a TSA Director, exemplified the former:

> *'…it's about meeting the needs of our schools in our partnership, in our alliance, in our district – you know, that is our role – its moral purpose isn't it…'* (Georgina)

An example of the latter came from MAT CEO, Robert, when discussing the re-brokering of two schools into his MAT:

> *'…two schools who basically were desperate for support, those lost schools if you like that the DfE refer to. But actually, you have to remember that if children are at the heart of everything*

we do, to say no to those schools and to leave them struggling is absolutely wrong… Sometimes you just have to have that moral integrity to think, how am I going to make this happen?' (Robert)

Personal values and moral stance, whether focused on the individual student, colleague or organisation, or whether applied to a MAT, TSA or to the wider system, provided common senses of purpose and seemingly reflected fundamental career rationales.

5.2.2.2 ***Rationales and compromise: public service, competition and equitability***

The excerpts above illustrate themes relating to values positioning largely based on public service, a position that could be seen as out of kilter with competitive, market rhetoric, commonly applied to the SISS. Kathryn was clear about her values being driven by principles of public service:

'I feel very, very passionate about public service. I buy in very much to the mentality of the serving headteacher. I think you are serving a community… I feel very strongly about the moral purpose. I feel very strongly about the public servant… when we talk… about the self-improving system, I have strong views on how it's being used in terms of people and structures.' (Kathryn)

Clive provided a widely represented view that senior leaders should use their leverage for the benefit of all children and how a values-led position necessitates thinking more broadly than school to school or MAT to MAT competition:

'…and the aggressive marketing… actually I think some people forget about what are we doing about the kids who don't get into our school. And while we all want the best for our school, we also want the best for every kid and every student…' (Clive)

Equity across the system was a recurrent theme and assumptions about a marketised, competitive system were questioned by several participants, particularly when talking about their own values in relation to system equitability. Michael, the headteacher of a MAT lead school was scathing of what he saw as over-simplistic assumptions in system architecture relying on finding solutions to the competition-collaboration conundrum:

> *'I don't think the system was set up for equity or equality or fairness really, I don't think that's the aim of it really… if you're looking at this from a social justice point of view you wouldn't start from here and I don't think that everyone gets the same opportunity or the same deal and I'm not sure… the self-improving system or whatever we call it is set-up for that.'*

He goes on to say:

> *'This is about shrinking the role of the state in public services and it's about the philosophy of the market… this is the belief that competition and markets will improve efficiency… not necessarily about the morality of education or opportunity…'* (Michael)

Kathryn's Senior Deputy Head, Natalie, discussed how leaders can do the best for pupils in their own MAT while knowingly disadvantaging those elsewhere. In reference to wide differences in socio-economic status and the associated social and cultural capital that might or might not be harnessed by parents, she said:

> *'I think there's a huge socio-economic factor to it as well... I think parental expectations are consumer led now and I agree that, yes, if you can come to* (own school) *and you can get into* (another school in MAT)*, you are potentially more likely to succeed.'* (Natalie)

Despite stated public service and equitability motives, leaders nevertheless celebrated positive pupil outcomes in their own groupings while sometimes also questioning the motives of others. Some

discussed how striving for excellence in their own school or grouping could create an uneven landscape overall (Greany, 2014; Greany and Earley, 2022) and therefore disadvantage others, unless a mature approach to collaboration had been developed. Several participants signalled unease about competitive groupings of schools causing disadvantage within the wider system. Participants' values drove their in-MAT or TSA behaviour and their aspirations for the system but seemingly failed to ameliorate these with apparent desires for an equitable system overall.

Michael, quoted at some length above, illustrated his own reflection on government and system architectural thinking:

> *'I always say that these people must have only studied half of an economics course – the bit about how markets work and not the other bit which is about how markets fail. Because what you see now is this… on one hand they'll say 'competition is good; dog eat dog' which drives efficiency and improvement, and on the other hand they'll say 'work together'. So how do you work together when you compete?'* (Michael)

As Thomson (2020) reminds us *'failure is built into competition'* (p114). It is interesting that Kathryn emphasised, so strongly, how seeing herself as a public servant drove aspects of her value-position when, as Thomson points out, a competition-based market inevitably results in failure as well as success, disadvantage as well as advantage:

> *'We are talking about human services, and young people whose life chances may well be damaged if their school or educational service is a market casualty.'* (2020, p115).

In discussing competition and choice in admissions policies for local schools and MATs, Stephen signalled largely unresolvable conflicts and how they positioned those seeking equitable admissions solutions:

'…it's how you overcome the conflict… working together and trying to have conversations and discussions and joint agreements. That works to a degree, but nothing's totally binding within that… So I think it's a real struggle, to be perfectly frank.' (Stephen)

Among the participants a small minority evidenced pragmatic, uneasy compromise in terms of their own position. Michael and Stephen recognised their positioning within a competitive system structure, but other participants seemed to avoid consideration of the impacts of competition. Leaders' motivations were laudable but there was clear recognition and perhaps, in some cases misrecognition, regarding unequal capital amongst MATs and the degree to which competition with collaboration could create a contradictory environment for equitable education.

5.2.2.3 ***Conclusions: The SISS and career rationale***

Ultimately, in considering the rationales of senior leaders within the SISS, an important problematic is exposed with several participants eloquently voicing a values-led desire for an equitable, quality education for all children in society. Participants illustrated how important social, cultural and economic capitals are in securing children's educational experiences and importantly, how these capitals are framed within and by the architecture of the system (Mills and Gale, 2007; Mills, 2008). There are complex personal positional compromises (Harré, 2012) that leaders navigate. Misrecognition of inequities determined by system architecture can be argued to result from leaders understandably relying on 'the system' serving all – with the SISS additionally being built on enduring market-theory principles of markets 'delivering' (Thomson, 2020). In rationalising and sense-making, historicity brings to each leader a sometimes-frictional blend of public service motive and desire for their own organisation to 'be the best. Hysteresis may exist as changing fields, habitus and personal principles conflict.

Individual and collective attributions or recognitions and perhaps misattributions (James 2015) and misrecognitions (Bourdieu 1979a, 2000), surfaced when they considered equitability within their own activity systems and across the system as a whole. Loyalties to their own organisations and to the whole system were often framed as compatible but when more deeply explored, often prompted questions about the robustness of participants' more fundamental motives. My findings suggest that participants' personal rationales for their own positions were based either on an uneasy compromise about wider problematics of the SISS, or on misrecognitions enabled by adopted, compelling, laudable personal motivations often based on moral duty and public service. For most participants, fundamental motivations seemed at kilter with structural, system truths.

5.2.3 Leaders' perspectives on their futures

School leaders varied in how they positioned themselves for the future, including in terms of succession or legacy. An emphasis on personal moral purpose as discussed above, foregrounded by Hargreaves (2012b) and politically harnessed by Gove (2010) was often linked to ideas of unfinished business. For some this manifested itself in a compulsion to protect a current position or to secure a fitting concluding phase to a career within or beyond the MAT or TSA. In some cases, there was a concern about burn out. Reflections were often contextualised by consideration of shifting and immature structures existent within the system. A key finding was that there was a sense of conflict between received ideas of moral duty, others' ideas for their futures and their own, inner instincts. These conflicts were amplified when senior, experienced leaders looked to their futures. The constraints effective on individual leaders reflected the '*multiplicities of self*' discussed by Davies and Harré (1990, p47) with all leaders balancing the rights and duties that inform individual *'story-lines'* (p46). Internal preferences and external stimuli influenced leaders' aspirations. Leaders have their own career objectives just as the fields or activity systems (Engeström, 2001) in which they lead

have such objectives. Individual leaders strive for a perfect best-fit in which the realisation of personal and organisational objectives align.

5.2.3.1 *Unfinished business and uncertainties about the future*

Across the seven MATS in this study there was evidence of experienced and authoritative senior leaders who spoke of unfinished projects which they wanted to see to a form of maturity or stability. Often, the desire to see projects become established and successful reflected Hargreaves' *'collective moral purpose'* (2012b, p17) which has been accentuated politically. MAT leaders like Diane often referenced ongoing professional and personal investment as contextualised within a challenging and immature system:

> *'I can't see beyond being CEO and sticking with what I've got… I've invested a chunk of my life to* (the MAT) *in particular. I think that the salaries of CEOs are immoral… so I almost see myself as staying in this position and trying to get this right in an immature system… to try and define what a CEO and a MAT should be…'* (Diane)

They almost all referenced the growth, development and success of the MAT as something for which they had accepted a form of personal responsibility:

> *'I think this is my project now isn't it? To maintain the quality of what we do here whilst building something that people admire. I haven't got much beyond that at the moment.'* (Kathryn)

Some detailed specific aspects of their plans, that remained incomplete:

> *'I've got a job to do here and it's not finished. The vision that I had four years ago, we've not managed, we've not got there with the 3 to 18… there's a clear job to be done.'* (Leonora)

For TSA leaders like Trevor, reflections typically centred on efforts invested into partnership building and a desire not to turn their backs on such complex accomplishments:

> *'My idea is, not to finish… I really want to continue. I think all the links I've built up. I've worked hard to build those links up … I don't want it to sound like I've had a career driven approach. I haven't. I've really reached out to make… connections…'* (Trevor)

For MAT CEOs like Leonora, there was a desire to protect expansive achievements and acquired symbolic capital. Individuals' career achievements often reflected investment in complex, socially and culturally constructed personal and organisational habitus (Bourdieu 1993; Reay, David and Ball 2001). These participants justified and rationalised such external effort as ultimately benefiting not them, but the Trust:

> *'… I will do as much as I can to support the RSC with the work that I can do within the time that I've got. I sit on the FASNA*[3] *Board and things like that. But I've got a job to do…. it's not about me, it's about the job I'm doing to get the profile so I often do things… because it's about* (name of MAT) *will get the profile…'* (Leonora)

There was a sense of these accomplished leaders celebrating their own part in forming intricate, multiply created objects (Engeström, 2001) but hesitancy in handing-over to others before such complex systems were developmentally mature. Some participants seemed awkwardly positioned, often because of their own success, with a sense of irony identifiable in a few. Significant effort may have been invested in making a particular school successful, guiding that school into becoming a key player in a MAT or TSA. For some they now found that the school grouping that they had been

[3] FASNA was the *Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association*, now the *Confederation of School Trusts*, which is a sector body representing school trusts in England.

instrumental in developing had taken on a life of its own and just at the point where they felt a sense of achievement, they realised that the grouping might have other plans for them.

Clive was aware that, as a particular academy was being re-brokered to his MAT following issues it had experienced within another, he would come under pressure to take on an expanded role:

> *'…well…* (Leonora: the MAT CEO's) *already primed me for it, about whether I want to be the Executive Headteacher of here and* (the in-coming re-brokered academy). *Honestly, I would love to just be able to stay a Headteacher… And actually does that then put your tenure in your current job at risk, and I'll be honest about that…'* (Clive)

A similar pressure for some, was to stay where they were because of the good job they were doing. Conversely this sometimes manifested as a concern or anxiety by their own line-managers who feared the challenge of replacing expertise with other MATs adept at retaining just the sort of leadership expertise they would be looking for:

> *'…last year, I did say to* (Kathryn: the MAT CEO)*, I've got another school in me and she had me upstairs the next day and said, "Are you leaving me?" And I went, "no, what I'm saying is I've got lots of energy", but I think, if the right opportunity came along, I would go and do this somewhere else.'* (Anneka)

In its most intense form, leaders' compulsion to remain in their current roles was associated with a very close professional bond between a senior team and its successful CEO. One established TSA, whose lead school had then started a successful and growing MAT, had 'grown its own' Heads of School and other senior role holders who seemed, to a degree, trapped by their own success and a form of acculturated reliance on their CEO. For Samera, as Deputy Head of School in her MAT's lead school, this exhibited itself as loyalty based on her whole career to date having been within this school:

'…she wouldn't want me to go 'anywhere'… I know she'll always be there… wherever she'll be she'll be there for me. From the moment I walked in… she picked my bags up and took them… I'll never forget that…' (Samera)

For Jodie, a Head of School, similar loyalty had resulted in a decision that she would never move on:

'But I feel she's my right arm really, and I don't mean that how it sounds… If she goes, I'll go.' (Jodie)

Gift exchange is interestingly contextualised within MATs, with professional positions earned or granted, but attendant responsibilities, effort and expertise exacted as a result (Bourdieu, 1980). There may be invisible or misrecognised pressures that compel individual leaders to act in certain ways. Some of the early career loyalties discussed in section 5.2.1 were still in place with leaders exhibiting followership with leadership (Crossman and Crossman, 2011; Gronn and Lacey 2004) in their transformational endeavours (Miller, 1998). Within MATs strong leader habitus can exist, hefting leaders in their activity system within a discrete field and with nuanced, complex forces at play (Bourdieu, 1979a, Martin and Gregg, 2015). Leaders demonstrated scepticism but also loyalty to their own achievements and typically to those above them. The challenges of navigating and surviving complex leadership hysteresis and compromise resulted in complex sense-making as leaders looked to their futures.

*5.2.3.2 **Expectations and handling pressure***

Despite such loyalties, some leaders expressed real concerns about how they and others within their MATs were increasingly pressured. Stephen, as a CEO and headteacher of a successful school, now leading a small MAT, expressed a concern about the policy environment:

'I just hope that nationally, we go into reverse gear about some of the obsessions…

government national policy ever shifting, ever changing, never being consistent, never being clear. And that's what they should fundamentally address. They should just let schools get on and do their job.' (Stephen)

Michael was specific about the direct pressures leaders had to bear:

'…there are many days where you think 'why on earth would I do this role – this is ridiculous' and it's the expectations, it's the complexity the ambiguity and the… not knowing where you stand in terms of the future, you know in a system… that's so ambiguous and volatile… If you stop to think about it nobody but somebody who's barmy would do this job actually.' (Michael)

Within complex leadership contexts, such worries about futures are likely to be common. An identifiable phenomenon, however, was mis-positioning within MAT structures. Michael had extensive experience in several schools but had then been promoted to headteacher from within his current school. A significant proportion of those interviewed had similar experiences of promotion within their school groupings, some finding it challenging to balance multifarious demands associated with running a school but also responding to MAT and central government agendas.

Similarly, experienced leaders who might be well-positioned to take beyond-MAT, regional roles were, in some cases, careful of the pressures associated with so-doing. Diane and Robert, both experienced and established MAT CEOs had been encouraged to consider opportunities to apply for positions as RSCs. Both of them were wary:

'…if that were to change and it really does become about a more manageable, much more strategic improvement of a region, then fine… but as it is at the moment… it doesn't interest me because I think that it's an impossible task that they've got…' (Diane)

'I had an opportunity to be the Regional Schools Commissioner eight months ago… Why would I when I love what I do?... I'm enjoying every single day of creating our own destiny as we move forwards. But, in terms of the future, in terms of how the sector evolves over time, I want to be part of that, not done to.' (Robert)

Within this complex school landscape, leaders can become mis-positioned or hemmed-in. Perhaps it is a result of these pressures, that more than one participant shared plans to exit their current roles by stepping back to earlier, seemingly simpler roles:

'…when I'm sitting there for four hours with a finance director, I'm thinking oh I'd much rather be teaching … you can be pulled away too much, and I almost think I will ultimately go back into the classroom actually, which I know sounds mad, and you won't hear many people saying that… (Diane)

'And therefore I can't see myself doing this long term. I'd be more likely to going back to being a teacher, or do something completely different. Who knows?' (Michael)

Leaders navigate disparities between their own career aspirations and what their employer wants, but it is not unusual for school leaders to find decisions about their future to be challenging because of the complexity and demands involved in school system leader positions. The expansive transformation that Engeström sees as important within collective, object-oriented activity systems, seen here in complex MAT/ TSA environments, generates positioning which can result in Bourdieuian violence and stultified and misrecognised agency.

5.2.3.3 ***Conclusions: Leaders' perspectives on their futures***

As Harré *et al* (2009) have argued through positioning theory, agents perceive their *'rights and duties'* (p6) and develop patterns of reasoning based on their own beliefs and experience. Complex

activity systems and the complex social and cultural factors affecting personal habitus can combine to create conflicts and hysteresis for such experienced leaders. The rationale of moral duty is important here and, as Fullan (2003, 2010), Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) and Bush and Glover (2014) remind us, it can be enmeshed in culturally reproduced notions of moral and ethical leadership. Internally and externally codified ideas of moral duty can either guide, counter or confuse future career direction. This is arguably more so when personal investment in the development of a MAT or TSA is either put at risk of reduced continuing recognition or diluted by a changed personal career direction or by 'stepping-back'. The gift of success and resultant power is one that is easily squandered or removed.

5.2.4 Closing notes: School leader career stories, rationales and perspectives on their futures

This section completes chapter 5's exploration of individual agency as a focus for school leader positioning and prepares the way for chapter 6 which explores perspectives on, about and through the structures leaders work within. Conversational interviews have consistently evidenced leaders' apparent reliance on career story rationales, how such stories have reflected motivations and informed forward perspectives on whatever comes next in their careers. Moral stance and such ideas as the public servant leader within an equitable system are evidenced as resilient within leader positioning. The suggestion emerges that hysteresis (Hardy, 2008; Courtney, 2017; Graham, 2020) might be useful in explicating the lived realities of leaders who have developed and exercised their roles in times of confliction and contradiction or in variance to the environment in which they find themselves (Strand and Lizardo, 2017). This idea is returned to in the context of changing system structures during chapter 6. Acceptance of leadership roles, typically quite early in careers and at a time before the SISS had developed into the MAT and TSA environment, means that misrecognition may be considered to have been a demonstrable career management mechanism for leaders in the

SISS. As leaders dissolve earlier misrecognition, it seems that examples of scepticism or stoicism emerge, but it can be claimed via these findings that misrecognition can assist in navigating the hysteresis of increasing competition and market-like activity within a personal career context where public service, equitability and moral duty are seen as important.

6 STRUCTURAL MUTABILITY AND SCHOOL LEADER POSITIONING

Chapter 6 has two sections, one considering how leaders' organisational structures position them and the other considering broader sectoral structure as a context. In this chapter there is a particular emphasis on the mutability of the structural context as this has emerged as a repeating theme in participant interviews. The first section explores themes of MAT and TSA structural complexity and leader responses to matters of grouping shape, size and growth, unsurprisingly bringing us back to competition. The final section discusses findings relating to structural constraints on leaders, how middle-tier change has affected their position and foregrounds leader perspectives on 'system' fragility and integrity. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory emphasises how structures are devised, maintained and renewed through human agency and Engeström (1999) suggests that multivoicedness and contradiction underpin dynamic expansive transformation of complex activity systems. In this chapter I focus on leader responses to these structures: the mutable organisations, layers, collaborative structures and system architectures with which they interact and via which they are positioned.

6.1 Organisational sense-making by school leaders

Having considered complexities of leader agency, I now focus on the complexities of MAT-TSA structures themselves. When considering the history of TSAs and their collaborative relationships with MATs, leader perspectives emerge on the benefits and risks involved. Professional trust (Bottery, 2004) and its relationship with often organic structural development also emerges as important. Perspectives on school grouping size and shape and on hub-based structural solutions are examined to provide an understanding of how such structural decisions have involved and affected leaders and ultimately framed their positioning.

6.1.1 Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures

Structural complexity is a characteristic of the SISS and school leaders' sense-making (Ganon-Shilon and Schechter, 2016) about multi-layered, overlapping and dynamic structures proved a key theme within my findings. Relationships between MATs and their associated TSAs proved significant and the complexity of senior leader roles in the SISS were strongly related to such expansive activity systems. Motives for academising included compelling references to often-complex relationships and networks involving participants' own organisations. For such expansive transformations to be realised, as Engeström & Sannino (2010) remind us, leaders invest in moving both *'up and outward'* and *'down and inward'* (p1) at the same time. Leaders invest outward-looking and inward-looking energies as personal career capital and activity system objects are realised and they inevitably look in both structural directions, in sense-making about their own leadership contexts. The focus here is on participants' own MAT-TSA groupings and their perspectives of these structures.

*6.1.1.1 **TSA-MAT collaboration: organic organisational development***

Importantly, though TSAs often had weakly defined relationships with MATs, participants were nevertheless able to detail complex outcomes. The training, development and support functions offered by TSAs, involved professional relationships between leaders across geographies and partnerships developed over time. Leaders celebrated these relationships. They emphasised benefits where the TSA and MAT had successfully agreed ITE, CPD and school support solutions. However, they were typically vague about how this worked structurally, often conflating aspects of MAT and TSA activity in their explanations. There was also some uncertainty over how governmental aspirations for a national system of MATs chimed with the fast-changing parallel TSA landscape.

A perspective shared by a number of participants was that Teaching Schools had contributed to MAT growth and often to their origins. As a TSA Director who had established her TSA, Charlotte saw

already-existent Training School relationships as important in early formational decisions regarding MATs:

> *'…a lot of the Teaching School's alliance schools have come within the MAT through working with the Teaching Alliance initially…'* (Charlotte)

The more loosely formalised structure of TSAs was argued by some to have provided existing trusting relationships among groups of schools, with this contributing to the development and growth of some MATs:

> *'…the schools are brought into thinking about the MAT through the work of the Teaching School… we've got several schools that are interested in our MAT… because they've worked with the teaching school... …For schools who've worked with us as a Teaching School there is that relationship, there is that trust.'* (Georgina)

Teaching Schools had sometimes recognised political expediency in forming a MAT. Charlotte suggested that such MATs then saw their Teaching School as a CPD, ITE and school improvement resource:

> *'…if your Teaching School isn't a MAT resource, well what a huge waste. So the Teaching School now sits far more within the Trust…* (Charlotte)

Trusted, looser structures like TSAs also provided interesting opportunities for relationships between MATs, enabling the sort of collaborative spaces described by Armstrong (2015) and Greany and Earley (2017) as necessary within otherwise competitive environments:

> *'…we're able to see the bigger picture better because we are a Teaching School… because of our Teaching School Alliance, we meet with other MATs… so you are able to find out what is happening in those other MATs.'* (Angela)

In connecting a TSA to a MAT, symbolic capital and complex, enlarged fields (Bourdieu, 1980) were enabled with leaders' own and organisational capitals being strengthened. Participants evidence that expansive learning and transformation (Engeström, 1999) was realised through collaboratively created structures within combined MAT-TSA activity systems although not without the contradiction and multivoicedness that Sannino and Engeström (2018) suggest is necessary.

6.1.1.2 TSA-MAT collaboration: benefits, risk and trust

Across all seven groupings, TSAs were seen as an important school improvement mechanism for MATs. Jill argued:

> *'…it's the vehicle for the Trust to deliver the school improvement, isn't it? It's crucial. I think it's got a much bigger role now than it had before because it is the driver…'* (Jill)

Expansive transformational opportunities for TSAs involved multivoicedness and contradiction (Sannino and Engeström, 2018) about their roles within an increasingly MAT-structured landscape. However, MAT growth generated demand for new teachers and for professional development for existing staff. TSAs were seen as a logical supplier, with associated MAT leaders like Kathryn often sourcing staffing affordably and collaboratively via a pragmatic internal TSA-MAT market:

> *'…there needs to be a teaching school in every MAT. It will also create the CPD… the school to school support… also the reason we have the SCITT is it's a recruitment and retention idea isn't it? Because…* (MAT-TSA Headteacher) *took five of our trainees last year...'* (Kathryn)

TSAs built reputations via trusted partnerships with associated MATs benefiting. Ideas of dissolving TSAs with MATs assuming training functions was seen as unwieldy and breaking established trust. This was particularly the case where ITE activity had been developed within a TSA School Direct or School Centred ITT (SCITT) scheme:

'…the one tangible thing that our schools can definitely see... being part of the Teaching School, the SCITT would be number one.' (Charlotte)

'I would hate to lose the brand image that we've got now; the (specific TSA name) *SCITT… but to be sitting under the umbrella of the MAT… you've then got all the CPD opportunities…'* (Anneka)

Participants most closely involved in TSAs communicated a nervousness about TSA status being affected by the development of Teaching School Hubs (DfE, 2020a). Defensive language among TSA focused participants suggested symbolic violence as some saw TSA status under threat with policy focus shifting towards MATs and regional TSHs. Legal, financial and governance controversies involving some academy schools (Thomson 2009, 2019, 2020; Gunter and Hall, 2013; Matthews and Ehren, 2017) led Robert and Charlotte to separately voice concerns about TSA accountability weaknesses:

'…actually MATs have been given massive accountability; teaching schools never have.' (Robert)

'…when you're working with schools who are not within your MAT, there are no lines of accountability are there? At all.' (Charlotte)

Expansive benefits achieved by harnessing TSA expertise, experience, combined historicity and organisational habitus were seen as threatened by potential new scrutiny. MATs were seen as subject to clear governance and control and performativity measures, but there were worries about the vulnerability of TSAs, with leaders normalising the arguable symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) of government accountability expectations of MATs, while recognising that TSAs were dangerously less accountable.

However, MAT-TSA networks were seen as important in individual leaders' experiences:

> *'…it's building those relationships… it's moving towards the school-led system and key to that is building those relationships …'* (Margaret)

Michael emphasised how expertise garnered through a TSA supported the leader-development culture within its associated MAT:

> *'…you're doing things that create a culture in which people take action themselves… bottom-up, top-down type of thing and we think a lot about… how we go about the business of leading leaders.'* (Michael)

As the Director of a Teaching School, Trevor emphasised how regional structures, developed through TSA activity over many years, had led to trusted networks that the MAT would be loath to lose:

> *'…what my experience is telling me is don't jump on every bandwagon… I've got this experience… Communication is the key. And the links I have are key.'* (Trevor)

Where participants spoke specifically of the complexities involved in leading across MAT/ TSA structures, two conflicting perspectives came across – often expressed by the same person. On the one hand the relationship of two overlapping, differently framed but related forms of school grouping added to structural complexity. On the other, TSAs provided solutions to leadership problems. Managing structural complexity was ultimately rationalised by Kathryn as leaders playing their role within the SISS in enabling the best outcomes for students in their school communities:

> *…it's where all of that ties in with the self-improving system really… it's joining all those factors up to make a difference. But what I think is really important… is making sure that every day, every child who walks through this door has a really good experience.'* (Kathryn)

Bourdieu's (1980) concept of field applies well to complex MAT-TSA structures and participants evidenced awareness of vulnerabilities associated with such complex activity systems. Participant habitus evidenced 'lasting dispositions' (Wacquant, 2005, p316) towards relationship building, collaboration and preparedness to navigate and draw advantage from the complexities of such professional environments. The multivoicedness and contradictions rife in complex, relational working and leaders' investment in expansive transformational MATs-TSAs, are typical of Engeström and Sannino's (2021) knotworking, as complex human architectures are shaped and reshaped.

*6.1.1.3 **Conclusions: Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures.***

Leader sense-making about MAT-TSA relationships exposed certain important phenomena. Political expediency and accountability were reflected in how TSAs considered their relations with MATs, given academy policy enactment (Goodwin, 2011; Ball, 2017). The theme of trust emerged repeatedly via leader sense-making about complex structures and partnerships forged over several years. TSA leaders emphasised trust as underpinning alliances, something identified in the Gu *et al* (2015) report to the DfE on Teaching Schools. They regretted that such trust might be endangered by any weakening of TSAs as MATs grow in importance and as the larger TSHs (DfE, 2020a) mature within the system and they worried about accountability pressures.

It is also worth dwelling on the organisational habitus and historicity attendant to TSAs particularly, and how, for example, this was often seen as fundamental in sense-making about MATs coming into being. As discussed in chapter 3, TSAs have a complicated historical provenance which has seemingly created an agentic 'ownership' of this history (Cochran-Smith, 2005b; Hagger and McIntyre, 2006) and which is imbued in professional memory (Bourdieu, 1979b) and therefore career story.

6.1.2 Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition

The competitive context for MATs, the political and economic questions associated with a marketised

approach and educational philosophies regarding MAT shape and size (Armstrong, 2015; Greany and Earley, 2017), figured significantly in participant responses. There were varied standpoints, from those who saw their MAT as needing to be as small as sensibly possible, to those who had clear and ongoing growth ambitions. For at least one participant in each of the MAT-TSA groups, issues of MAT size and structure merited significant discussion.

School leaders appeared to be positioned uneasily regarding growth. The balance between serving political imperatives and possible competitive advantage on the one hand and retaining hard-won organisational educational reputation on the other, was often difficult to maintain. There were concerns over balancing resource. Deep-ingrained ideas of moral imperative and duty often translated into rationales of benefiting wider populations of students and their communities through growth of their own organisation. However, there was a strongly developed position in many small and medium-sized MATs-TSAs that individual MAT schools should in some way be geographically accessible and that this was therefore a key inhibitor to unbridled growth. Geography and geographical solutions proved important.

6.1.2.1 Size and growth rationales and game playing

Participants almost all conformed to a doxa of MAT growth. This manifested itself quite variably but was evidence of a general acceptance of an assumed competitive environment and one where there was somehow a new or developing, perhaps elusive, best shape or size (Greany, 2017; Wilkins, 2017; Simon, James and Simon, 2021). On the one hand Diane talked of clear, ambitious growth strategy:

> *'…the benchmark keeps shifting but we think 12000 students is what you need to have actually something that's quite sustainable and, easier to manage than we are doing at the moment…'* (Diane)

On the other, Kathryn had agonised about both becoming a MAT and then about the ultimate scale of it:

> *'… but the MAT? I couldn't get the shape in my head. What was it? Was it credible as a way forward? Was it a sufficiently robust legacy issue for the school? Was it right? So I grappled with that for quite a long time… I know what it needs to be and what it doesn't need to be.* (Kathryn)

Such conflicts exhibited themselves via a range of concerns about school and trust structures. These included the retention of reputation and status in the locale and region; protection against future policy change; the need for financial prudence in an increasingly marketised environment, and the need to maintain specific or unique school or MAT qualities. Nathaniel saw growth as an inevitable result of a sense of moral mission and school-to-school support responsibility.

> *'…a lot of our MAT growth is born out of our normal school improvement work… we would support a school … and then that school has seen the benefit of that and asked to join the trust.'* (Nathaniel)

A particular sense of mission or responsibility was apparent in the comments of Jill, a MAT CEO in a small but expanding MAT, where the lead school was a Church of England (CE) secondary and where growth was planned to involve admitting CE primary schools for whom quality measures were becoming an issue. The positioning of the diocese and one of its key secondary schools in shielding some of their more vulnerable primary schools against potential sponsorship into non-diocesan or mixed MATs, evidenced a politically defensive position:

> *'The Diocesan Director of Education was desperately keen that we became a MAT – he was the final sort of push to become a MAT because he needs a safe harbour if any of the primary schools go into a category.'* (Jill)

School leader habitus seemingly assumed involvement in a game to be played (Wacquant, 2005) relating to MAT size and trajectories of field growth. Several participants evidenced a degree of internal and external conflict about whether growth was a defendable. Leaders demonstrated an interesting mix of apparent moral positioning on the one hand and forms of political manoeuvring or game-playing on the other, reminding us of Hargreaves' (2012b) discussion of *'collective moral purpose'* (p17) as a key building block of the SISS. Although moral duty was signalled in participants' responses it cannot be ignored that in growing small or medium sized MATs there was often a pragmatic tendency to defend future organisational resilience by for example, encouraging-in feeder primaries. This can be further nuanced in cases where there are additional existing layers of middle-tier, such as a diocese.

Kathryn voiced an awareness of her own positioning in relation to her MAT's growth and a decision by potential primary school trust members not to join:

> *'…who do I think I am to be with those primary schools? I have no experience, I have no knowledge. I'm not a credible leader of primary schools within this MAT… What I am is somebody who can build a good secondary school.'* (Kathryn)

The SISS exhibits historicity via pre-established communities and joint undertakings (Engeström, 1999; 2001) such as those within a faith community or a secondary school's feeder community. Organisational and leader cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977a; 1977b) play their parts in complex and nuanced ways. Resulting contradictions emerge as historical allegiances, relationships and ways of doing things are resolved with new and developing structures like MATs. Bourdieuian misrecognitions (Grenfell and James, 1988; Bourdieu, 2000; James, 2015) may be at play for some leaders as they proclaim and demonstrate motivations for MAT growth. These proclaimed motivations can be subtly different from more pragmatic game-playing imperatives, however a sense

of acting carefully and with integrity was clear in the approaches of these leaders to the growth of their small and medium-sized MATs.

*6.1.2.2 **Hub arrangements and geographical vulnerabilities***

Regarding the geography of MATs and associated TSAs, several participants talked of established or planned hub-based structures and many considered travel times and proximity between lead schools and other member schools. Talking of a well-known landmark after which her MAT is named, Kathryn explained:

> *'…from there you can see about 45 minutes distance in each direction, which is the amount of time I'm prepared to spend in a car to go and see other schools'* (Kathryn)

This was a common sentiment among MAT leaders and to some degree, TSA leaders too. Expanding on the above point, Kathryn also detailed a curriculum-oriented rationale for proximity:

> *'…if you want to do law, you go to* (name of school) *and if you want to do psychology, you come to* (name of school). *We're 2 minutes from the train line. They're 5 minutes from the train line.* (Kathryn)

Almost all participants advocated a general benefit in leaders and staff being able to visit member schools:

> *'…for a Multi Academy Trust to truly work effectively, they should be able to travel in half an hour to an hour of each other, because beyond that it means it's not sustainable to have meetings and things because you'd spend most of the day travelling.* (Stephen)

Two MATs already had established and growing hub arrangements working regionally or sub-regionally and three more were actively working towards this. Clive, from one of these, a growing MAT, cited its potential reach across a large county:

> *'I think… the Trust per se would love to have a hub model.* (The county)*'s so big…'* (Clive)

Hub models provided leaders with a tool for maintaining their sense of organisational focus, community and shared values while also enabling shared leadership, governance and resource solutions. They provided a rationale and legitimisation of growth. There was a view that measured, careful growth was acceptable when solutions such as hub arrangements enabled retention of core values, vision and purpose. This chimed with DfE guidance from 2016:

> *'…most trusts find that a local focus, or a series of local hubs, makes it easier to communicate, share good practice, and create a common ethos within a trust.'* DfE (2016d) p22

An expanding MAT allows social reproduction (Pajak and Green, 2003), as leaders replicate their own existing models of school organisation and reflect their symbolic power via gift-giving and violence (Bourdieu, 2001). Symbolic violence may be present as executive leader actions impact on individuals. Multivoicedness and contradiction (Engeström, 1999; 2001) are inevitable as activity systems expansively transform.

Siobhan, the primary headteacher recruited to form a two-school MAT, cited positive reasons for playing her part in enabling the secondary lead school to move from single to multi academy status. However, she also worried about reduced influence if the MAT grew further, arguably exhibiting earlier misrecognitions and possible symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2000):

'An ideal scenario would be for it to stay exactly as it is… just the two schools working alongside one another and that there wasn't another primary school coming in also wanting all that help and support, but it's not going to stay like that I'm sure…' (Siobhan)

Within the layered leadership of MATs there are those who feel greater exposure with change. Games of advantage involve inevitable decisions relating to organisational size and structure.

6.1.2.3 Conclusions: Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition

Questions of MAT size and shape were key structural and sense-making concerns for leaders and were centrally associated with questions of competition and collaboration. Once again, the paradoxical expectation that groups of schools within the system should both compete and collaborate (Armstrong, 2015; Greany and Earley, 2017) was evident. It is difficult to ignore the deployment of power (Bourdieu, 1979a; Wacquant, 2005) by leaders within their collaborative but competitive fields when considering MAT growth and geography. Moral imperative was repeatedly cited as the key rationale for arguable symbolically violent, competitive activity (Thomson, 2020) disadvantaging others in the field. Participants put significant emphasis on their moral duty to protect existing schools within their Trusts and deployed geographical, structural and size related rationales in doing this.

6.1.3 Closing notes: Organisational sense-making by school leaders

In this first of two sections in this chapter, the effects of organisational complexity and structural decisions have been explored. Expansive transformational contradictions associated with expectations of both collaboration and competition and the knotworking required to lead in such environments (Engeström and Sannino, 2021) are evident. Having explored some of the multivoicedness and contradiction experienced at school and Trust levels it seems clear that these phenomena are critical and unavoidable in school, MAT and TSA level responses to the SISS. The final

section in these findings now turns to leaders' sense-making in relation to developments across the wider SISS itself.

6.2 School leader sense-making about the wider school system

Certain findings related to how leaders felt positioned within wider structures, beyond their own schools, Trusts or TSAs. Developing a wider school system structural architecture influenced leadership experiences within MATs-TSAs with dichotomous experiences of autonomous opportunity and structural rigidity evident. Leadership often took place in opaque multilayered structures beyond and as a result, within their groupings. Leaders had a lot to say about middle-tier change with uncertainty about LA diminution and teacher supply, possible emergent replacement structures and associated positioning of standalone academies and dioceses. Perceived system structural immaturity resulted in concerns about organisational fragilities and individual vulnerabilities including concerns over governance structures and future leader supply. Discussions illustrated processes of sense-making about leaders' own positioning in a complex developing landscape.

6.2.1 Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system

Leader experiences within the SISS reflect recognitions and misrecognitions about relationships between them, the organisations they lead and the larger, system context. While leaders had realistic, and sometimes sophisticated, positions on the dichotomous relationship between their agency and standardisation within their MATs-TSAs, there was a sense that the gift of autonomy is one that is reliant on permitting circumstances: an adverse inspection can reduce autonomous agency within, or even across a MAT very quickly. Also, autonomies were seen as differently framed within the business related or educational related aspects of school leader roles, even in endogenously framed school groupings (Ball and Youdell, 2008), with less opportunity for autonomy in the former but perhaps more in the latter. However, there were clear differences in the degree of

autonomy seen as available within and across leaders' own activity systems as opposed to the school system as a whole, with some frustration that *school-led* realistically meant *system-led* and that therefore, ideas of meaningful autonomy were substantially diluted. There was uneasiness about *system* or above-MAT structures, how such structures were developing for the greater good of the wider system and how they might impact on MAT-TSA level agency.

6.2.1.1 System architectural impact: structural rigidities and ideas of autonomy

Multivoicedness and contradiction within organisations reflected leaders' use of social, cultural and symbolic capitals in advantaging themselves and their organisational architectures. In such regimes of practice (Gunter, 2016), the price of school group autonomy was an inevitable growth of in-group and group-to-group competition with concomitant structural volatility. Trevor discussed the impact of an increase in school support activity within a TSA and its closely associated MAT:

> *'…it didn't go down well with the governors when I sort of said, "Right, our Deputy Head is going to go and support school Y. She's going to go there for a term, because they really need some support in leadership and management." And they said, "Well, what's going to happen in our school?" And I said, "Well, you've got teacher X, teacher Y and teacher Z who can step up now.'* (Trevor)

In 2012 Gunter identified this as a key challenge of system leadership where:

> *'…teachers have the work of the headteacher distributed to them under the label of empowered leadership, so that the headteacher can take on responsibility for more than one school.'* Gunter (2012) p23

For the above TSA the gift of empowerment was arguably also a symbolically violent act, increasing workloads within the school grouping. As a MAT CEO, Kathryn discussed complex activity across and within structures:

> *'…we wanted a school led system didn't we?... This is what we thought we could do. OK. But there's lots of sort of ironies associated with that… a school led system requires us to lead beyond our own institution and what we have to balance is what happens to our own institution in that.'* (Kathryn)

Nathaniel discussed the phenomenon of promised, and apparently agreed, school autonomies reducing as more standardised MAT-wide structures embedded:

> *'…we wanted to have a Trust that was very autonomous… I think as time has gone on, autonomy has become a little less freely available and standardisation and centralisation has become more prevalent.'* (Nathaniel)

For him, individual school autonomy reduced markedly when a school's outcome measures fell, with an individual school having freedoms only when it merits them.

> *'You can be autonomous if you are an 'Outstanding' school, getting outstanding outcomes year on year. Where you're failing… where your outcomes aren't where they need to be, where you're vulnerable, that autonomy has to be more shared… we started off with this autonomous journey, and actually… we've got to be a little more standardised…'* (Nathaniel)

Participants evidenced how both the freedoms of organisations to manage themselves and the freedoms of their constituent schools and leaders were subject to complex constraints originating from both within and beyond individual school groupings.

There were discernible differences in the autonomy senior leaders felt their schools held in relation to business and education focused work (Ball and Youdell, 2008). Trust member schools had less freedom in how they conducted their legal, financial, regulatory, staffing and business operations as these were structurally locked-in. There was less MAT level structural rigidity regarding schools' pedagogical decision making. In relation to the business aspects of running a Trust, Robert said:

> *'…education as a business is very much non-autonomous. Ultimately we're one employer and I'm accountable for everything. And therefore it's very much top down in terms of anything that's legal or contractual...'* (Robert)

However, regarding the educational responsibilities of Trust member schools he felt that:

> *'…in terms of Education… Why is it down to the Trust to be top down there in terms of what those schools do? It has to be more autonomous at school level.'* (Robert)

Access to resources was seen as a significant structural weakness which impacted on leadership for change. Several participants cited system improvement work having been limited or curtailed because of complex, competitive bidding processes. As a TSA Director, Trevor described the collapse of a regional school-to-school support mechanism, when specific Teaching School support monies dried-up, as an example of structural resource failings:

> *'Now if at the time the money had been available… If we'd had the money to release those people, it could have worked.'* (Trevor)

Structure-agency contradictions within groupings' educational and business environments might ultimately breed expansive structural transformations (Engeström, 1999) but in Bourdieuian terms, MATs and TSAs were subject to specific rules and limitations to opportunity within their overlapping

national and organisational fields. Leaders, apparently expecting autonomy for their MATs, TSAs or individual schools, felt constrained by organisational and government structures.

*6.2.1.2 **Locating leadership agency in multi-layered structures***

How leadership was differently and variously located either at the individual school, MAT/TSA, or wider system resolutions proved revealing. Some participants were quick to proclaim confidence in leadership agency:

> *'…when people say 'you've got to do this and you've got to do this' we stand by what we believe is right and actually we would argue the toss …'* (Jodie)

Others inhabited a position of pragmatic compromise, arguing that a robust emphasis on teaching and learning would mean that the accountability required by Ofsted or the DfE was an understandable price worth paying. They accepted that centrally determined accountability and performance systems were an inevitable but acceptable limitation to local leader agency:

> *'So in terms of Regional Schools Commissioners, DfE, Ofsted…so long as you are serving the needs of this community and the children of this community and the families in those communities and delivering the very, very best teaching and learning that you can deliver… then the outcomes will speak for themselves and everything else will fall into place.'* (Robert)

However, most others suggested that centrally determined structural and resource issues were inhibiting school-to-school regional and local initiatives, arguing that central government restrictions and funding rules stifled these. As a MAT CEO and TSA lead school headteacher, Leonora cited a dissatisfaction, mentioned by others, with a Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) bid process and its resulting outcomes:

'…they're being a lot more directive… and… that goes against the system leadership agenda… they nailed it so tight there was no flexibility on making it the right impact for those schools… That's not what that school needs and that's not what the NLE's saying… so for me that was a backward step…' (Leonora)

Leonora's use of *'directive'*, *'no flexibility'* and *'backward step'* exemplified a repeated theme: that promises of 'school-led' actually meant 'system-led', but where associated 'system-leadership' was not enabling school leaders themselves but was in fact orchestrated from the DfE. A feature of several responses was increasing confusion around what school or system leadership actual meant and that this was changing. Participants typically signalled a stoic understanding of the forces that were really at play, supporting a possibility that misrecognitions of the reality of where the power lies in the SISS are, in fact inwardly 'known' if outwardly not admitted (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

6.2.1.3 Conclusions: Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system

The symbolic violence inherent in a competitive approach to schooling is important. As Thomson (2020) reminds us, every successful partnership-based bid for resources, or sponsorship of a school needing support, means converse failure elsewhere in winning resources in limited supply, or a surrender of power and position to a new sponsor. Also important, is that the gift of autonomy at the school level within a MAT is always a gift that can be revoked via similar in-MAT symbolic violence. Interestingly, the stifling of local autonomy and initiative discussed above has often been a criticism levelled at the LA led system. David Bell, the permanent secretary within the DfE as the academy programme developed, is quoted by Brighouse and Waters' (2021) as wondering whether the opposite has happened:

> *'The irony is that many schools have less autonomy and freedom as an academy than previously. The control exercised by some MAT CEOs sometimes borders on the draconian.'* (p152)

As Gunter (2016) reminds us, complex regimes of practice involve complex interrelationships between school system structures, government and other players. Freedman (2022) particularly argues for the importance of reducing such system structural complexity. Knowing how to play the game is vital and misrecognition can result in a game poorly played. Agency is contingent on success within a complex system of structures and the shared objects (Engeström, 1999; 2001) being acted on within complex MAT/TSA activity systems are influenced by varying factors both from within and beyond. It can be argued that the system as overseen by central government is an overarching activity system and that there is an upper middle-tier above MATs inhabited for example by RDs. MATs and TSAs themselves are arguably the community within this activity system and subject to larger system structural rules. Individual MATs themselves provide the contradictions and multi-voicedness within this larger system, thereby enabling expansive transformation. Such a perspective can certainly be theorised via Engeström's (2009; Engeström and Sannino, 2021) fourth generation Activity Theory. The neoliberal paradox is that the SISS is based on government ideas of expansive transformation via multivoicedness, but that government can also act to stifle this.

6.2.2 Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of system maturity

Perspectives and contestations of middle-tier structures were evident. Contradictions abounded with historically informed perspectives, centred on the roles of local authorities, and in some cases dioceses, conflicting with participants' changing understandings of whether a middle-tier was necessary and whether MATs themselves contributed to a new middle-tier in England. Government-framed structures such as Regional Directors, Advisory Boards (RSCs and Headteacher Boards (HTBs) at the time of data collection) and TSHs also figured in middle-tier considerations. My findings reflect

system structural challenges associated with the parallel state-funded mechanisms of LAs and academy structures (Simkins *et al*, 2015; Crawford *et al*, 2022; Freedman, 2022; Matthews and Ehren, 2022).

Leaders were uncertain, or even uneasy, over a seemingly unsatisfactory architecture in between individual schools and government and particularly about how academy brokering and rebrokering worked. MATs were seen as both subject to and part of the solution in middle-tier manoeuvring but the rules of engagement and any sense of consistency (Greany and McGinity, 2021) were questioned. This was particularly evident when examining approaches involving faith schools and dioceses and their changing relationships with MATs. Participants saw having a school-based initial teacher education scheme as middle-tier relevant but again, deeper rationales for this were inconsistent.

6.2.2.1 Middle-tier diminution, local authorities, standalone academies and Teacher Education

Clive, as a headteacher in a MAT with hubs in several LA areas provided a view, shared by others, of a middle-tier distributed in its structures and effectiveness:

> *'You've then got the RSC… Head Teacher Boards… multiple layers of accountability on top of MAT structures which are holding SATs… and also the other schools to account and you've also got the LA in there. …Could MATs replace the middle-tier? If everyone was in a MAT, yes. The problem is… nobody's going to have the political will to ever do that.'* (Clive)

LAs typically inhabited an important historical place in participants' own and collective stories, though this was changing. Of the MATs and TSAs accessed in this study some were in areas where many schools, particularly at primary level, had stayed as LA schools and some were in contexts where the LA's involvement had been diminished. A complicating factor was that in some areas significant numbers of schools had become standalone academies, meaning the weakening of LAs but also that governmental aspirations for a MAT-based system were inhibited. Georgina summed-

up a perspective held by several, that there was a clear policy direction away from LAs:

> *'I mean the idea is to replace LA isn't it, ultimately… that's what the government want… they want academisation, they want MATs…'* (Georgina)

She went on to describe the contradictions at play in her own area:

> *'There's a lot of schools that are quite happy with what they're getting from the LA. The only concern they have is 'well we're going to be forced… in the end… we're going to be forced – so choose now while we can'…'* (Georgina)

Robert reflected on the government's preparedness, early in the history of academisation, to allow many convertor schools to become standalone academies. He discussed how this left RSCs with a challenge as a relative lack of MATs and a weakened LA context made support for brokering or re-brokering difficult:

> *'…you have got those Single Academy Trusts working really, really well where there aren't Local Authorities and therefore are providing challenge back to Regional School Commissioners…why should I?'* (Robert)

Challenges arising from a weakened local government middle-tier were exacerbated by reduced resource in key functions within local authorities (Crawford *et al*, 2022), meaning that they were slow or limited in their ability to undertake their own responsibilities in terms of conversion. Jill, in an authority area that retained several maintained schools described the situation when she was working to bring an additional school into her MAT. Referring to responses she had received from a senior officer in the authority, she described:

'…a great problem with the LA… for a very straightforward conversion which could have been done in a month took a whole year… they have no personnel there, the place is in chaos. The lady herself said the LA is in crisis…' (Jill)

As Simkins *et al* (2015) and Greany and Higham (2018) discuss, the middle-tier has been eroded for some time with the move away from LA structures. A common concern of participants was consistency geographically, particularly regarding school improvement and support work:

'I'm not saying that the LA was great… but… there was at least a certain degree of consistency that would happen across the area. And what we see now is a vast lack of that so… to try and find the appropriate fit for the improvement work and how the support can go in can in itself be more challenging.' (Stephen)

A resigned and pragmatic view of LA demise was common with Seb, the TSA Director working with Leonora's Trust, saying:

'…my infrastructure really is dependent on working very closely with the LA. Now some LA learning-improvement services have diminished so there's other mechanisms. I think our LA's hanging-on by its finger nails.' (Seb)

In discussing school-to-school support and her MAT's Teaching School, Kathryn discussed how TSAs were responding to diminished LA capability:

'We're trying to fill the gap with teaching schools… we're doing a really good job in supporting some of our most vulnerable schools. And I think we're doing some good work… but it doesn't quite yet… feel sufficiently joined up?' (Kathryn)

In this, the SCITTs or School Direct initial teacher education schemes that all Teaching Schools have been involved in, were seen as a critical aspect of local and regional level teacher supply and therefore, part of a mid-level structure:

> *'Well again, I think that our SCITT is very, very successful so one of the major ways we contribute is to provide excellent new entrants to the profession.'* (Georgina)

> *'If we can help attract new teachers and people who are interested in teaching from beyond the area… then we will have done our very best to try and help the system from a system leadership point of view.'* (Stephen)

School and employment-based routes, via SCITTS and School Direct schemes, were seen as playing their part in a refocusing middle-tier with emergent TSHs as further evidence of this.

The middle-tier has emerged as an area of contestation and contradiction with the dislocated habituses referred to in Courtney's (2017) suggestions of governmentally supported hysteresis (Bourdieu,1996a; Hardy, 2008). Such dislocations might be argued by Engeström and Sannino (2010; 2021) as consistent with activity-system to activity-system expansive transformational change.

*6.2.2.2 **Diocesan schools and middle-tier challenge***

Leaders reflected on how flexibility helped with collaborative work at this scale. A good example was the way that one growing open (non-diocesan) trust, which had a church school as its lead school, had steered a careful course with its trust members over acceptance of non-church schools:

> *'…because they're not a church school and we're an open trust… and I want diversity… that's what you want. We're not there to proselytise.'* (Jill)

The position that faith organisations play in the reconfiguring middle-tier is nuanced and complex. The above MAT CEO, Jill, saw a *'classic Church of England fudge'* and described how the local diocese was itself manoeuvring at the middle-tier level, with a church school leading an open MAT at the centre of a potential hub arrangement for primary CofE SATs needing sponsorship:

> *'…he sees us as the northern hub in that strategy because church schools can't join anything else and there were no MATs for them to go into.'* (Jill)

Interestingly, Stephen discussed how a CofE primary SAT that was requiring significant improvement had been begrudgingly accepted by the only CofE diocesan MAT in the county because, in that diocese, there was a lack of preparedness to allow a church school to be taken up by his own, non-diocesan, open MAT. As the school was an academy, the diocesan MAT would get no additional funding and diocesan policy meant that its primary schools could only enter the county's single diocesan MAT. This meant that this successful secondary-led MAT, with only one primary school, could not encourage-in the remaining local feeder primaries, as they were all CofE schools.

Margaret, also in an area where local dioceses were prepared to see church schools join mixed MATs, spoke of her MAT's effective working with such schools:

> *'…we are not a faith school… but you know we are open and able to work with those who do have that faith distinctiveness…'* (Margaret)

She made it clear however, that her MAT and TSA would not be in positions to support such church schools in preparing for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) process, meaning that this would be left to the diocese itself. Dioceses and MAT structures clearly had some way to go in forming mature approaches to a changed middle-tier.

6.2.2.3 *Conclusions: Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of system maturity*

The middle-tier has been much written-about in the context of the SISS (Goodwin, 2011; Muir, 2014; Woods and Simkins, 2014; Simkins *et al,* 2015; Ball, 2017; Greany and Earley, 2017; Greany and Higham, 2018; Simkins *et al,* 2018; Matthews and Ehren, 2022) and there was undoubtedly a shared view among participants that some form of middle-tier is necessary. Participants discussed middle-tier immaturity, suggesting contradictions in how organisations operate together through expansive system-to-system learning (Engeström and Sannino 2010; Sannino and Engeström, 2018). Initial teacher education and diocesan partnerships can be 'knotworked' (Engeström and Sannino's, 2021) with solutions to wicked problems (Grint, 2010) being sought. The contradictions and multivoicedness associated with Activity Theory take time in realising mature expansive transformation.

Leaders' established habitus can conflict with emergent new middle-tier approaches. Associated with such historically contextualised contradictions and hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1996a; Courtney, 2017) are opportunities for symbolic violence, stemming from leaders' *'durable principles of judgement and practice'* (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008, p5). School leaders deploy compromise and flexibility as they aim to fill gaps and co-construct new system architectures (Hargreaves, 2012b). Inconsistency and inequity are key concerns (Freedman, 2022), as are missed opportunities for genuine collaboration because of entrenched positions.

Middle-tier change particularly illustrates neoliberal positioning of school leaders with the government influencing approach within increasing numbers of schools through MAT and TSH policies. This is messy though, with existing SATs, remaining LA structures, some difficulties in realising effective teacher supply through school-based systems and complexities associated with faith school structures and engagement. Brighouse and Waters (2021), discussing the 2019-21

Secretary of State's return to the idea of all schools becoming academies, suggest that he:

> *'…set out what he wanted to achieve but with little indication of how he would persuade, cajole of force those who had so far not seen the light to move towards it.'* (p162)

There was recognition in participant responses that the growth of the SISS, while impacting significantly on LA provision had in many cases not yet seen a concomitant improvement via new architectures:

> *'…it undermined the efficacy of local authorities…. my disappointment is… that we don't seem to have improved the situation by moving to… more of a school-led system that's based on credibility rather than relationships.'* (Diane)

It seems that, having moved to disassemble what the government saw as a politically unpalatable LA system, it left school leaders craving a satisfactorily credible, but still unclear, mature alternative.

6.2.3 Fragility and the integrity of the system.

Senior leaders' perspectives on the robustness of system architecture (Hargreaves 2010, 2012b) reflected concerns about fragility in system and governance structures, risk in supporting weak schools, resource vulnerabilities and senior leader capacity. For many participants there was a detectable pragmatism often based on stoical notions of making things work for their own students and organisations, but within immature system structures.

*6.2.3.1 **Ofsted threats, TSA vulnerabilities and support for weak schools***

As a TSA Director, Charlotte shared a common concern relating to consistent support for schools in positions of challenge:

'…formalising it in a way that works and crucially doesn't miss out those schools that are in desperate need of that support, so that they don't fall through the cracks' (Charlotte)

There were frustrations that schools could find themselves in a particular trust when in some cases another might be better placed to support them. In relation to supporting schools in areas with specific challenges relating to deprivation, Nathaniel discussed how:

'…if you are a Trust with a couple of coastal schools… you might not be best placed to support those schools. It might be… a different Trust that have a preponderance of those children and can support...' (Nathaniel)

Several participants had concerns about scenarios where a MAT's lead school might suddenly drop into an Ofsted category. That the MAT-based school system means that it is not just a single school, but possibly a group that are affected, was seen as a vulnerability:

'…they could slate us tomorrow and bring us down from a one to a four overnight… we're Outstanding today, we could be a four tomorrow.' (Michael)

Natalie echoed this concern with reference to TSA vulnerabilities as framed by policy at that time:

'…the pressure on our school now is to maintain 'outstanding', because if you don't, the amount of things that we would lose… our Teaching School Status… would be devastating to our context.' (Natalie)

At the time of the research there was concern over variability and geographical inconsistency in TSAs. One participant talked of such inconsistencies *'…whereby a number of them appear to overlap each other…'*, as he saw it, leading to '*…antagonism and competition…'* (Stephen) which he saw as the opposite of how TSAs should work. Anneka echoed this worry:

> *'There's too many little silos who have been granted Teaching School status… Instead of working together, there's a lot of empire builders who are closed doors. They won't collaborate because it's all about self-preservation.'* (Anneka)

Interestingly, the government acted on these concerns, already highlighted in part by Gu *et al* in their 2015 evaluation report, when in 2020 the DfE (2020a) announced the restructured TSH system. However, in contrast to the above view, Trevor was concerned about how this changing policy might weaken some of the historic work undertaken by TSAs at a more local level:

> *'I really was enthusiastic… I had a good vision along with everyone in the group, where we were aiming for, what we needed to do. That has all changed with this Teaching School Hubs. It's thrown a lot of uncertainty amongst people.'* (Trevor)

Symbolic violence is inherent in a system based on often quite small groupings where governmental alterations to structures are inevitably particularly impactful. Leaders sought the system architectural maturities suggested by Hargreaves (2010, 2012b) but communicated a real sense of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977a, 1980) as capitals they hoped for or understood to be secure, proved elusive. A SISS founded on localised and devolved leadership is seemingly reliant on a sense of security and trust for those leading within it. Sahlberg and Walker (2021) suggest that *'schools change at the speed of trust'* (p150) and the concern here is that Activity Theory's fourth level of contradiction (Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino and Engeström 2018), instead of describing expansive transformational benefit between school groupings, actually reflects debilitation between school groupings and government itself.

6.2.3.2 Frustrations and conflicting views over rebrokering

As a MAT CEO, Clive shared a frustration about externally determined regulatory, governance, legal and financial challenges experienced when accepting schools re-brokered from another MAT:

'…one of the issues with (the re-brokered school) *is that the Trust that they've been in hasn't really been supportive of their journey as all.'* (Clive)

In this case, collaboration from the original MAT was poor and the RSC and DfE seemed unable to make the transition a smooth one. While some participants communicated frustrations in partnership building beyond MATs, others demonstrated agency and empowerment in this regard:

'Just because a school isn't formally rubber stamped and the academy order isn't issued and they're part of a Trust, doesn't mean you cannot work with a school… Just because they haven't got an academy order, they can still work with other schools.' (Nathaniel)

Concerns about risks in taking weak schools into MATs were palpable, however. Natalie agonised over conflicting instincts with moral duty tempered by the need to manage risk to existing MAT schools:

'…your heart tells you, you need to take on a… school, to try and change it. But that's not easy is it?… If you get told that you've got to take that school on, you've got to sponsor it...' (Natalie)

At root, her concerns were about a desire to retain her MAT's own agreed values-position but also its record of success. Taking on schools needing support was clearly a threat to this in her mind:

'Are we trying to build a Multi Academy Trust with very likeminded schools… because we have the same traditional values or… take on other schools that we want to improve? And I think that's the dilemma isn't it?' (Natalie)

Stephen, as the CEO of a small MAT was clear:

'…we have to be very careful with preserving the really high standards that we've spent years to establish and to maintain here… yet at the same time also be conscious that we are supporting the wider school system and trying to do our bit there.' (Stephen)

Referring to his MAT's potential sponsorship of a school in an Ofsted category, he listed issues including significant financial risk based on the school's estate and energy liabilities and an unacceptable likely demand on his own experienced senior leaders, saying; *'…there just has to be a realistic conversation about what is possible and what is not.'* (Stephen)

This position was echoed by several other CEOs and Maria, as Executive Principal in a MAT that had sponsored three failing schools was particularly keen to emphasise the risks:

'…we can't become a Trust that only takes on failing schools, because… then… we are spread too thin… This is the main school… if this school dipped… it would make us vulnerable, and we can't be vulnerable.' (Maria)

*6.2.3.3 **Governance and risk management***

Within Trusts, there were mixed feelings about governance structures. A common model was the double layer of a local academy board at the school-level and a trust board at the MAT level with governance power restricted at the local level but with day-to-day decisions made here. This double layer was generally seen as effective in comparison to previous school governing body and LA structures. A common aspiration among participants was to see the administrative burden reduced with concomitant advantageous economies of scale via central service operations, however Clive spoke of *'one of the challenges of being a smallish trust'* being that central service advantages were not fully mature:

'As the Trust gets bigger you would hope that there's more central services, more capacity in there.' (Clive)

Siobhan, the headteacher of a small primary school, now in a MAT, appreciated the expertise and governance capacity now available to her school via the trust board. She said it:

'…gives you that support and perhaps that thought that 'yes you are doing it OK', so it's giving you the rubber stamp (on) *those decisions you've made…'* (Siobhan)

The CEO of a larger, developing MAT described the perspective of a senior leader who was driving change:

'We audited our collective strengths… and then we went out and sought people to join… So we ended up with an incredibly strong group.' (Angela)

In these two examples there was variation in professional capital available and deployed. The first participant was content to allow trusted others to guide her and the second was happily doing the guiding. Leader-follower power-play (Gronn and Lacey 2004), symbolic violence and the knowing deployment of symbolic capital were evident. Strengths and fragilities in MAT boards were recognised by Diane:

'…a lot of the MAT Board are retired, and they would not be able to do it without being retired… so it's questioning have you got that right… and succession planning for that Board, occupies us a lot at the moment...' (Diane)

TSA governance was typically much less formal than that of MATs, something that ultimately contributed to the DfE's (2020a) change towards TSHs. Such informality was illustrated by one Director of Teaching School discussing her TSA strategic board:

'We've just said, "Do you want to come and play?".' (Anneka)

One risk management philosophy was that measured risk reflected a moral imperative and that the SISS required this:

> *'…by giving people opportunities to experience other school settings… they come back much better in their home organisation than they were before. Obviously… everything comes with a risk and you have to manage that effectively.'* (Leonora)

Risk is at the heart of any competitive environment (Thomson, 2017; 2020) and in the SISS, just as in any system with degrees of autonomy, decisions must be managed relating to external and internal threats and opportunities. School leaders emphasised their own school grouping's success, often codified as reputation. However, reputation was typically put in a balance with moral duty, with protection of established organisational habitus and capital within a MAT while also supporting the wider system. Leaders in the SISS are positioned by '*rights and duties'* (Harré *et al*, 2009, p6) and by constantly gauging how symbolic violence might be offset against advantages gained. These balancing acts were evident in how MATs developed internal governance structures. Thomson (2020), Apple (2006; 2017), Gibton (2017), Courtney (2015a, 2017) and Greany and Higham (2018) all remind us that in competitive environments, for every school or child that succeeds, relatively speaking there are always those that do not. To retain integrity for their organisation and own career story, school leaders navigated environments subject to risk and fragility.

6.2.3.4 ***Vulnerabilities in leader supply, expertise and succession***

There were apprehensions about system-wide succession planning and leader supply. A concern was that individual trusts tended towards generating their own senior leaders, resulting in a lack of cross-system mobility and leadership learning:

'…there are a number of high profile Chief Execs… who are retiring at the end of this year. Some of whom interestingly haven't gone to advert because they've succession planned and their deputy is stepping into that role straight away… there's an awful lot of Trusts at the moment who've ended up with a CEO by default.' (Robert)

Leonora shared her view that MAT CEOs, where possible, should be teachers and not from a purely business background:

'…it's capacity though… I passionately still believe that the right people to run as CEOs are teachers… the best people to be in that system leadership… we've got to find a way of encouraging people to do that.' (Leonora)

Clive, who Leonora was asking to move from leading the successful MAT lead-school to leading a re-brokered school, had concerns over staffing capacity:

'…school improvement capacity is by nature limited… what you can't do is strip too much of that capacity out of your existing school because you eventually damage where they've come from. It is a really fine balancing act.' (Clive)

At an even more profound level, Michael was concerned about what he perceived as a dwindling number and quality of senior level school leaders. He had a concern:

'…about headteachers being like football managers… you've got a small pool of people who… are mad enough to run the risk… you just succeed at some ones and fail at others… At the moment what's happening is inappropriate people are doing it.' (Michael)

Several participants also shared concern about leader expertise in financial bid-writing. Market structures rely on competition for resource and several participants talked of the need for appropriate expertise. As a MAT CEO and TSA lead, Kathryn was honest about this:

'I think we make it up… And we hope… I would love to say we have people who are experts in that regard, but I think again it's another example of good people having a go.' (Kathryn)

Her Director of Teaching School, Anneka, felt that professional bid-writing expertise was quickly becoming essential:

'…you've got to employ a bid writer… I'm not a bid writer… But how many people are missing out because somebody didn't write a bid on their behalf?' (Anneka)

Leadership capacity, expertise and succession planning are essential capabilities within a fully functioning SISS. For expansive transformation to be realisable and sustainable, school leaders need to be well-positioned (Coldron *et al*, 2014) with career hysteresis (Bourdieu 1996a; Courtney, 2017) minimised and healthy career routes enabled.

6.2.3.5 ***Conclusions: Fragility and the integrity of the system.***

In their exploration of school leadership and system reform, Earley and Greany (2022) conclude that it *'…is clear that the loss of coherence and the uneven development of the system is problematic'* (p277). Freedman (2022) calls for a reduction in complexity. Complex expansive transformational processes, contradictions and multivoicedness reflect system fragility. These were identifiable within MATs, between MATs themselves and between MATs and government, evidencing Activity Theory's fourth level of contradiction (Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino and Engeström 2018). Engeström's (2001) observation that activity systems endlessly act to resolve contradictions but that, in doing so they also unearth new contradictions, seems very pertinent. Contradictory educational structural doxas are at play here with symbolic violence manifest in the pressures leaders exert on each other and with individual school leaders balancing risks to themselves and their organisations. Importantly, social systems like school 'systems' are reliant on a degree of consistency and stability so that specific contradictions and multivoicedness can be positively harnessed. Hargreaves (2010;

2012b) emphasised a need to realise system maturity and particularly such maturity being based upon *'partnership competence'* and *'collaborative capital'* (2012b, p13 and p22). Participant comments about leader supply, expertise, deployment and succession seem to suggest that structurally such maturities were still some way off.

6.2.4 Closing notes: School leader sense-making about the wider school system

This second chapter 6 section has provided a range of views on leader sense-making about the wider school 'system'. Leaders detailed how defining and locating new and changing structures remained uncertain – with inconsistencies over regional Advisory Board operations and MAT growth as examples. They expressed concerns that inconsistency and inequity remained as phenomena that affected children and their families. Leaders seemed clear about the incremental diminution and indeed replacement of established LA structures, but they craved mature alternatives and new middle-tier coherences. When considering structural impact at resolutions beyond leaders' own schools, Trusts or TSAs, the fourth generation of Activity Theory (Engeström, 2009; Sannino, Daniels and Gutierrez, 2009) provides a model for how large scale knotworking and system to system expansive transformation (Sannino, 2017) operates. The symbolic violence present in senior leaders' professional lives seemed however, as impactful at the wider resolution as at the in-Trust and in-school resolutions. Risk management and avoidance of exposure to potentially debilitating vulnerabilities, in this wider context, seemed to have a real impact on the leadership behaviours of a significant proportion of my participants.

Chapter 6 has analysed SISS structural concerns, using dualist principles in harnessing these to further explore school leader agency. I have aimed for this chapter to allow a deeper understanding of the 'system' which agents like senior leaders are expected to improve. This juxtaposes chapter 5's focus on the leaders and their agentic experiences and stories. In chapter 5, application of Bourdieu's thinking tools has resulted in hysteresis of habitus and habitus with field to have emerged

as a key feature of career stories. Similarly, misrecognition emerged as necessary in leader sense-making of hysteresis-imbued career stories. In chapter 6 Engeström's third and fourth generation Activity Theory has provided a framing of the mutable structural environment leaders have navigated. The historicity of schools, groupings and the wider 'system' has proved essential to contextualising leaders' stories of contradiction, multivoicedness and ultimately how expansive transformation might work. Through both chapters, Bourdieuian symbolic violence has been seen as pervasive, explaining leaders' reliance on misrecognition in their career story sense-making about their positioning within a construct of expansive transformation.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: LEADERSHIP POSITIONING IN THE SISS

In this final chapter I present my core findings and conclusions. I start by summarising my overall claims and then detail how these claims add to recent and contemporary research into, and conceptualisations of, the English school 'system'. I also make clear how my core findings might contribute to the school leadership professional sector's understanding of itself. I then suggest how and to whom my findings might be usefully disseminated. Having done this, I consider the limitations of my research and what course future research might take following this thesis and future questions begged by the claims I make.

7.1 Core findings

Five core findings emerged via the coding process, the 10 key themes analysed in chapters 5 and 6 and the selective coding process. These core findings relate to the participants of this specific study, undertaken at a particular time during which the school sector in England had been changing and with certain structural approaches beginning to embed. They are:

i. Hysteresis has been a common experience of senior leaders repositioned by SISS-associated changes in the school sector in England.
ii. Contingent leadership, typically values-based, is identifiable as a response to the psychosocial, challenging, mutable contexts of leadership during this period.
iii. Career story sense-making is consistently important in providing rationale for school leaders who have navigated mutable contexts.
iv. Misrecognition has been a hidden necessity of school sectoral reform with the developing SISS relying on school leaders ascribing meaning to enable their positional rationales.
v. Historicity is critical to school leaders' sense-making of contradictions and multivoicedness and resultant expansive transformations.

My analysis adopted Giddens' (1984) dualist recognition of an agency-structure environment in social contexts. I identified five themes that arose through analysis of school leader agency as well as five themes that emerged by analysis of mutable sectoral structures and how participant agency has been shaped by them. This examination of the SISS as an object, adopting these two agency-structure perspectives and coding-led themes, has allowed the above core findings to emerge. Abductive phronesis (Thomas, 2010), via conversation-based, semi-structured interviews within a multiple case study, has enabled conclusions to be posited. Ultimately, just as agency and structure are inextricably intertwined, Bourdieu's and Engeström's theorisations have usefully provided synthesised theoretical perspective across the agency-structure domain.

The collection and analysis of data took place during the summers of 2017 and 2019. The analysis of these data and the writing of the thesis has taken advantage of a five-year period since this. This has allowed a historical perspective which has proved particularly informative to these core findings. It has allowed my interpretation a temporal contextualisation and therefore, additional perspective on the positioning of the leaders I interviewed.

The five core findings are detailed below.

7.1.1 The importance of hysteresis

Hysteresis has been a common experience of senior leaders repositioned by SISS-associated changes in the school sector in England.

A key finding of this research is the existence of palpable career hysteresis (Bourdieu 1996a; Courtney, 2017) within school leaders' careers, whereby confliction exists for leaders between earlier cognised career story and recent and current field-oriented action (Graham, 2020; Strand and Lizardo, 2017; Bourdieu, 2000). As discussed, Courtney (2017) has suggested that such dislocations are an overt aim of state manipulation within the school sector and my research found compelling

supporting evidence for this. In exploring leaders' career story rationales and their sense-making, I conclude that hysteresis was a manifest inevitability, indeed a governmental system necessity, for agentic movement from LA structures towards MATs and in theatres of change like TSAs and TSHs. Hysteresis exhibited itself in leaders' narratives about their careers within schools, within and across MATS and TSAs and in leader career activity beyond such groupings. There was evidence of established habitus being reconfigured (Hardy, 2008) in leaders' rationalisations as a revised habitus was accepted and applied to altered school system fields. School leaders demonstrated complex and nuanced discontinuities between where they thought their careers were going and how they had in reality developed. Postulation about future career development and about leaders' legacies additionally emphasised frictions in their positioning and potential further hysteresis.

For some leaders, such variances were embraced as opportunities for personal career advancement and for playing a part in system expansive transformation. However, they could also result in mis-positioning with sometimes uneasy balancing of ideas of moral duty or public service, as against protection of leaders' own school's or grouping's interests or engagements with increasingly market-like approaches. Importantly a suite of strategies or rationalisations were used by leaders to explain and justify individual positions. Some of these raise suggestions of misrecognition as I will discuss in another core finding, below.

The historicity of school system change and the analytical approach of my study has, I claim, made habitus reconfiguration observable to me the researcher in a way that it will not have been to the participants themselves. Bourdieu's view of habitus as formed of subconscious unthinking habits suggests a lack of knowing visibility by leaders themselves. Mills (2008) view, that habitus shapes life choices but is not in itself what determines these choices, allows for the transposability suggested by Bourdieu (1979b) and the hysteresis identified by my research.

7.1.2 Contingent leadership as an effective approach in a 'self-improving' context

Contingent leadership, typically values-based, is identifiable as a response to the psychosocial, challenging, mutable contexts of leadership during this period.

The reflexivity and pragmatism offered by ideas of contingent leadership are observed in this research as an effective and widely adopted style by senior leaders navigating aspects of the SISS. As Gu and Johansson (2013) observed, both positive and negative contextual challenges require leaders to respond with realistic and bespoke approaches. My research repeatedly evidenced leaders as using an approach based on 'what works' and indeed I conclude that such a philosophy is a psychosocial necessity when leading in recent and contemporary school sector contexts. The dualist structure-agency approach taken in my research has allowed a clear view of the critical importance of context, but also of leader conceptualisations of and response to these contexts. Contingent leadership describes well the approaches used in complex collaborative activity and partnership work, in TSAs but also in building MATs. It also represents the leadership behaviours required in responding to government instigated change, new structures and the complexities of a mutable middle-tier. Leaders' concerns over system fragmentation (Woodin, 2012; Courtney 2015b; Keddie and Mills, 2019), exacerbated by partiality in MAT developments and LA weakening also mean that contingent approach has become an effective response. It reflects pragmatic solutions-finding more effectively than parallel ideas of postmodern leadership (Taubman, 2009) have.

My findings evidenced much discussion of moral duty, and the language of authentic leadership (Wilson, 2014) was repeatedly evidenced with Woods' (2007) ideas of personal, ideal and social manifestations of this, showing a good fit to my findings. As a core finding however, it is the 'contingent' – the necessary recognition of mutable context – that seems particularly fundamental to my research, and so ideas of *'values-based contingency leadership'* as argued for by Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001, p52) and expanded on by Warwas (2015), provide a compelling 'fit' with leadership

style as observed through the interviews. Bush (2019) observes that contingent leadership is particularly relevant to *'periods of turbulence'* (p13), and when it is enacted with attendant values-led agentic approach, I argue that it is the nearest that the adjectival cataloguing of leadership 'types' (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999; Bush and Glover, 2014) gets to describing the reality of school leadership within the SISS.

7.1.3 The need for career story sense-making rationale.

Career story sense-making is consistently important in providing rationale for school leaders who have navigated mutable contexts.

Career story sense-making rationale emerged particularly noticeably as a theme across all of the participants interviewed in this research, and so I consider it as a core finding. School leaders talked compellingly about changes in direction, and of support and pressure from others in making changes, as well as reasons why certain alternative opportunities might not have been taken up, and how decisions were framed by policy and approaches to policy. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) characterise sense-making as involving the understanding of ambiguities, often opaque contexts and challenging changes to earlier norms. This characterisation reflects the circumstances related on numerous occasions by participants in this research. Positioning theory, which draws usefully on narratological approach (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré *et al*, 2009) emphasises relationships between the rights of social agents and the duties they have to perform. Leaders I interviewed evidenced these conflicts, often discussing decisions they had to make or reflections on the challenge of being governed within constraints. Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2016) point out that, critical in sense-making is the mediation of current events with earlier experiences, beliefs and values. As discussed in my first core finding on hysteresis, Bourdieu might see this as habitus adjusting to changes in leaders' fields.

The need for a career story rationale was palpable amongst participants in this research. They seemed to want to 'make-sense' about how they had got to where they were within a changed, fragmented and changing 'system'. Their anxieties and uncertainties emerged on occasions and the subconscious defences social agents can adopt against such anxieties (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), as explored in psychosocial approach (Ford, 2010), are not dissimilar to habitus reconfiguration. I contend therefore that school leaders' experience of the SISS has resulted in degrees of dislocation and reconfiguration which themselves have resulted in a 'need' for them to provide a personal rationale: a 'story' for how this happened and that satisfactorily explains and justifies their current position.

7.1.4 Leader misrecognition as a necessity of the developing SISS

Misrecognition has been a hidden necessity of school sectoral reform with the developing SISS relying on school leaders ascribing meaning to enable their positional rationales.

A fourth key finding is that the self-improving school system in England is reliant on misrecognition (Grenfell and James, 1988; Bourdieu, 2000; James, 2015). James (2015) explains Bourdieu's view of misrecognition as a '*social practice'* depending on both *'individual or collective misattribution'* (p100) and I found repeated examples of leaders attributing meaning in support of personal career story rationales but with half-acknowledged positional compromise. Dominant discourses in the school system saw leaders subordinating themselves in power gradient game playing and adopting or normalising new positionings, often without recognising how these had come about. Responses involved participants verbalising and in so doing unlocking features of career stories that had often not previously been fully cognised. My contention here is that committed, organisationally loyal, student-focused school leaders found themselves positioned within academy trusts or TSAs based on forms of half-knowing acceptance of sometimes symbolically violent acts. They found themselves re- or even mis-positioned via contexts that relied on their and sectoral misrecognitions.

Participants evidenced agentic misrecognition as a critical feature of the developing SISS in England, enabled by structural complexity, symbolic violence and enduring inconsistencies and inequalities. These misrecognitions were important in how school leaders within the 'system' were positioned by both others and themselves. Contradictions such as collaboration with competition and public service ideals with marketisation (Ainscow and West, 2006; Chapman, 2013; Greany and Earley, 2022) fuelled them, as did the lived processes of refocusing career stories. At their heart was the shifting personal habitus of each leader and a simple need to sense-make via career story rationales as they have seen their fields of operation change under system reform; a personal need to counter un-cognised forces of hysteresis. Frustrations over apparent 'truths' about leadership agency and organisational autonomy seemingly drove misrecognition tendencies. Restrictions in deployable capital and leader desire, or even need, to be loyal to their MAT or TSA whilst also being true to themselves within a power gradient, also required misrecognition. School leaders interviewed for this research were striving for and wanting to project authenticity and in this, Gunter's (2002) explanation remains useful, that:

> *'…there can be a process of misrecognition in which power relations are not seen for what they are but are interpreted in a way that is seen as legitimate.'* (p11)

Leaders were subordinated (Connolly and Healy, 2004) as the social practices of *'individual or collective misattribution'* (James, 2015, p100) took hold with symbolic violence thriving on what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to as *'complicity'* as leaders found the solutions to their own career stories.

Misrecognition sometimes helped explain participant responses, with contradictory statements such as: *'...you get greater agency if you accept the accountability'* (Diane) and *'I feel I've got complete autonomy but I'm quality assured…'* (Maria). At other times participants evidenced misrecognition in others while demonstrating that they, professionally were positioned such that they also lived the

misrecognition. When Michael voiced his concern that government considered: *'…the bit about how markets work and not the other bit which is about how markets fail'*, perhaps he reflected a misrecognition evidenced by many, that certain players or organisations within the SISS would by design, fail. Bourdieu's argument that domination becomes *'disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships'* (1977a, p191) with power relations seen *'not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder'* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, pxiii) seemed to be not just a feature of the SISS, but fundamental to it.

7.1.5 Historicity's critical part in leaders' sense-making about the SISS

Historicity is critical to school leaders' sense-making of contradictions and multivoicedness and resultant expansive transformations.

An important result of data having been collected over the period they were was that participants had typically some memory of arrangements prior to schools becoming academies and of the development of TSAs. This proved more relevant and important than originally envisaged, as the agentic misrecognitions and hysteresis exposed in participants' professional career stories were to some degree informed by historical occurrences experienced (Goodson and Choi, 2008). Engeström's (2001) emphasis on historicity in expansively transformational activity systems has proved particularly relevant in this historically located enquiry. Leaders had experienced academy conversion and, in some cases, sponsorship arrangements and many of them had experienced both LA and MAT structures. Several had started TSAs and had predicted the move to TSHs. They had experienced periods of significant structural transformation and therefore had been particularly exposed to re-evaluated and interrupted personal and institutional habitus with resultant career hysteresis, as discussed above. Misrecognition was particularly relevant in enabling agentic strategies (Grenfell and James, 1988) and sense-making (Ganon-Shilon and Schechter, 2016), as mutable structures were expansively transformed. Career story rationale has been particularly

important to those who have lived through periods of disruption and change, not typically envisaged earlier in career plans. Leaders' memories of earlier agency-structure solutions and their recalling of professional journeys in actioning altered systems, provided rich career stories but also, seemingly, a desire to sense-make and a need for rationale. The story lines (Harré *et al*, 2009) that contribute to leader positioning were wholly embedded in the historicity of a developing system.

I argue that the experience of contradiction is critical in school leaders' sense-making, with participants learning from structural tensions between schools within groupings, between MATs themselves, between MATs and government officials or between MAT structures and LAs. Engeström (2001) notes the importance of contradictions within and between activity systems (Engeström and Sannino, 2021) and participants also related the secondary contradictions resultant when for example, government introduces revised policy. Importantly, contradictions are important in how they historically accumulate. For participants, the ways that contradictions layered one on another as their roles in MATs and TSAs developed was only exposed via the approach of historical retelling. As Smith and Tushman (2005) suggest however, contradictions recognised and knowingly harnessed can lead to success, and several participants evidenced career-building based on successfully navigating contradictory challenges.

Finally, I argue that personal and organisational successes related by my participants are the result of their ability in handing the multivoicedness of schools, MATs, TSAs and the wider 'system'. Harding's (2000) argument that such complex organisations are forged on negotiation, bargaining and *'tacit understandings'* (p55) is reflected in the histories that inform school leaders' sense-making and their resultant rationales. This research has shown that school leaders, when prompted, can point to how contradiction and multivoicedness have contributed to the expansively transformational development of their schools, MATs and TSAs wherever they are in the 'system'.

7.1.6 Conclusions: Core findings

I have demonstrated in these core findings, that the expansive transformational change that Hargreaves envisioned via a SISS, given the partiality of its realisation and ongoing immaturity, has been experientially challenging. School leaders have experienced hysteresis and policy makers have in fact relied on this. As a strategy, school leaders have become contingent leaders, adept at responding to context and change. Nevertheless, as agents of the social sphere, school leaders have needed personal career story rationales based in a need to sense-make about their past and current circumstances. With hindsight, misrecognition can be seen to have helped enable them in navigating the career-stories they have been building, and their resilience in 'staying in the game' has depended on such misrecognitions. A final observation is that the process of conversational interviewing has itself allowed recognitions of things previously misrecognised – and this is therefore also an observation from this research.

7.2 The contribution and dissemination of this research

This research contributes a sociological understanding of how school leaders can be affected by 'system' level change, particularly when that change is externally determined, complex and fragmented. The research contributes some understanding of how school leaders navigate and survive such change. Specifically, the research explicates what happens when changing cultures and philosophies of school system design reposition senior leaders against earlier norms. It also contributes understanding of the importance of sense-making about such repositioning. I discuss, below, the contribution this research can offer to the academic community and to professional fields as well as considerations about its dissemination and about related future research opportunities.

7.2.1 Contributions to the academic community

The use of Bourdieu's (1996a, 2000) thinking tools alongside third (Engeström, 2001) and fourth (Engeström and Sannino, 2021) generation Activity Theory has enabled dualist structure-agency (Giddens, 1984) perspective. It is hoped that this theorisation of school leader agency and school 'system' structure has provided the opportunity for similar studies, or critical reviews and attendant learning, in similar or other social fields in the future. By applying aspects of positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré *et al*, 2009), psychosocial approach (Ford, 2010) and sense-making (Weick, 1995; Ganon-Shilon and Schechter, 2016) I have provided additional understanding of the agentic responses to the structural changes explored. Of the range of leadership 'types' available from a 'long list' (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999; Bush and Glover, 2014), contingent leadership is suggested as offering a particularly useful frame for exploring leadership in complex and changing contexts.

A contribution is my explication of hysteresis as a likely, if not inevitable feature of leader experience when a sector-wide social system, such as schooling, is reconfigured. Hysteresis is a result of such change being significant in duration from instigation to enactment and beyond, as leaders will have known earlier systems and developed habitus based on this. Leaders, to use a term foregrounded by Hargreaves (2010, 2012b), are themselves part of the 'system architecture' being remodelled. For these reasons, I suggest that analysing hysteresis is likely to be a useful approach in studies of similar contexts.

If hysteresis is important in how agents have been affected by system change, then misrecognition is, I argue, a critical process in enabling this. It might similarly be a useful focus for similar enquiries in the future. In this research, with reliance on leaders themselves facilitating changes from within the 'system', misrecognition has been essential in enabling the hysteresis experienced. I contribute the argument that, when there is a volatile re-norming of a social system, including changes to cultural

and philosophical structure-agency norms, then hysteresis affects individuals and misrecognition can enable this. The architects of change, I argue, rely on misrecognition by those enacting such change, and I argue that this may be a useful starting point for similar studies.

I contend that values-led contingent leadership (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001) is a leadership approach typifying leaders who find themselves positioned within culturally and philosophically new and changing structures. Hysteresis and misrecognition may help enable leadership in mutable contexts and a pragmatic, contingent approach enables the discharging of responsibilities in contexts of compromise while retaining a values-led position. I propose as a contribution to the field that values-led contingent leadership may from a useful research focus for understanding social actors in other complex environments of contextual change.

Finally, I contribute assertions on the importance of historicity in allowing, and recognising, the contradictions and multivoiced engagements that are necessary learning when system expansive transformation is a goal: and on the importance of career story rationale for key agents involved in this. Complex change takes time and truly expansive transformation needs this. In travelling such challenging journeys, a need to sense-make about them becomes an important aspect of agency itself and rationale for actions taken, becomes important for an actor's 'record'.

7.2.2 The contribution of this research to the professional field

My findings provide useful perspectives for those advising and guiding leaders where the navigation of changed cultural and philosophical system contexts is necessary. My core findings detail: specific, selected effects of complex change on leaders (particularly hysteresis) and psychosocial mechanisms experienced (particularly misrecognition), a pragmatic leadership approach observed among successful leaders (values-led contingent), the need for a historical perspective when playing your part in big and complex change (historicity and expansive transformation) and the need for a career

story rationale (sense-making). This research's contribution is an explication of how school senior leaders recognised and rationalised their positioning from within a neoliberal, marketising, ideologically constructed system when, for each of them, there has been tangible investment in ideals of equitability and educational entitlement for public sector schooled children. I suggest that there is real benefit in exposing this as there may be a disjoint between sectoral celebration of authenticity in leadership on the one hand (Gardiner, 2011; Bush and Glover, 2014) while on the other there is evidence of hysteresis and misrecognised purpose and rationale.

Leader resilience, and leadership careers based on meaningful progression, can be threatened in the high stakes, demanding and performative cultures of the social world (Steward, 2014; Earley, 2020). I argue that it is important that those leading the school sector in England and those in wider system leadership roles, take account of the positioning pressures and psychosocial context that contribute to leadership challenge in times of system change. It is perhaps realistic to assume that Government itself may be unlikely to see this as necessary, in which case employers with their own duty of care and sectoral bodies such as the Chartered College of Teaching (2022) or the Confederation of School Trusts (CST, 2019), both in England, could consider the conclusions this research makes about leader positioning. Realistically, the neoliberal context described in section 3.2 is likely to mean that within the professional field, individual leaders, schools, Trusts, TSHs and leader education programmes represent the most likely locations for sector located consideration of this research.

7.2.3 Opportunities for dissemination

The most useful route for dissemination of these findings on school leader positioning is via consideration in leader education professional programmes or via indirect communication of the findings via educational leadership academic programmes, or both. To bring the findings to the notice of such programmes it is intended that publications and dissemination via sectoral conference events will follow this thesis. I hope that understandings of leader positioning in times of changing

sectoral approach might help inform those aspiring to be leaders and those starting or already engaging in leadership work as they develop their careers.

7.2.4 Future research

I suggest three principal considerations regarding future research: a need to further explore structures and agencies emerging as school sector change occurs in England, an argument for future research in the social sphere to consider the synthesised theoretical approach of accessing both Bourdieu and Activity Theory and similarly, a proposal that conversational, semi-structured interviewing is particularly appropriate.

Firstly, there is a need for further study of structural and agentic change within a school sector environment in England that continues to develop at pace. Such change needs further monitoring, theorising and understanding. I argue that, as with my research, there is a need to jointly consider structures and the professional, agentic lives of leaders within future enquiries. Structurally, the roles and effectiveness of middle-tier phenomena such as RDs and ABs invite careful further scrutiny regarding their impacts on individuals, organisations and the sector. Recent policy discourse as exemplified by the 2022 Education White Paper (DfE, 2022a, 2022b), and future policy statements should certainly invite analysis. The size, distribution, geography, structural organisation and collaborative approaches of MATs and of TSHs are also areas for further and ongoing research. Governance, MAT conversion and sponsorship and TSH roles in national training structures may provide similar foci. Further research into the agentic professional lives of school leaders will be particularly important, with leader career development and mobility, approaches to leadership including values-led contingent approaches, as important potential themes. Of direct future relevance to my own findings is the opportunity to further research the roles of hysteresis and misrecognition among leaders as they position themselves. My suggestion is that this might lead to further useful learning where there are culturally and philosophically changing contexts for such

research. The school 'system' in England certainly provides a continuing context for such research and clearly, research in other national educational systems may be similarly revealing. My data were collected between the summers of 2017 and 2019 and therefore, a follow-up study in England could make an important further contribution.

A second proposal for future research is that the theoretical approach of harnessing both Bourdieu's thinking tools and Engeström's third, and especially fourth (Engeström and Sannino, 2021) generation Activity Theory, could be adopted and further developed. The historical understanding that Activity Theory can provide of how expansive transformational change operates in complex multimodal and interrelated structures, could provide useful future research conceptualisations when combined with selected consideration of Bourdieu's tools. As one example, examining leader hysteresis and misrecognition in concert with system structural historicity may have future and differing applications. Perspectives from positioning theory as provided by Harré and his collaborators can be further utilised in future research, particularly given their useful consideration of how agents' rights and duties relate to positional contexts and how 'story-lines' emerge (Harré *et al*, 2009). The adoption of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a broad frame for organising analytic structure may also be useful in future enquiries.

Finally, I suggest that conversational interviews that enable analysis of rich, dialogic discussion can expose a depth of experience and insightfulness of narrative that is of particular use when exploring the lived experiences of complex actors in complex environments. Phenomenological approach to understanding leadership within complex environments, and the positioning of those leaders, is well-served by conversational interviewing as it exposes the present, but also the professional memories of participants. Without this approach, I argue that examples of hysteresis and of school leaders' misrecognitions would have been difficult to effectively identify and explore.

7.3 Concluding thoughts

This research has sought to answer the question: *How do senior leaders in Multi Academy Trusts and associated Teaching School Alliances view their own position and agency within the developing 'self-improving school system' in England?*

Themes relating to this question, as identified in chapter 4 include firstly, how leaders are positioned in relation to apparent policy assumptions that they 'lead the system' from the local or the school-grouping level. My research has demonstrated how the contingent leadership approach demonstrated by school leaders, has enabled a pragmatic response to a reality that sees challenging local leadership responsibilities mixed with often significant, centrally handed-down accountability and systems expectation. This relates to a second theme from the research question, whether there are positioning incongruities associated with leaders' lived experiences of (re)centralisation and/or decentralisation in the policy environment. The hysteresis observed in the findings in no small measure stems from agencies assumed as being associated with a locally led, decentralised 'system' when in fact, a locally accountable, centrally determined but fragmented and confusing-to-lead 'system' has emerged. A third theme concerns the relationship between leaders' careers and their own philosophies and motivations. The altered habitus-field relations of hysteresis describe well the way that leaders have sought 'fit' between what they want to achieve in their careers and the system-delivered expectations of MATs, TSAs and the wider SISS. However, leader misrecognition has helped enable this as well, with participants having at best, sometimes only half acknowledged what they were really 'signing-up for' or would have to compromise. A values-led form of contingent leadership has enabled, I suggest, a pragmatic, better 'fit' with leaders' philosophies and motivations. Finally, a fourth theme is the mutability of fragmentary school system structures and related, frequently changing policy, and illustrates the benefit of historicity in analysing complex systems, the

people working in them and the understandable need by them to sense-make when relating their career stories.

Williams (2012) has suggested how exchange value emphasised by Bourdieu in agentic gift-exchange and use value associated with Activity Theory (Engeström and Kerosuo, 2007) can be usefully synthesised. Holland *et al* (2001) agree by suggesting that the societal can enter the individual's world via such synthesis. I have harnessed these theoretical perspectives for the sociological tools that they offer and have particularly emphasised symbolic violence, hysteresis and misrecognition, and historicity, contradiction, multivoicedness and expansive transformation in this. My linking of theoretical perspectives has demonstrated that such synthesis can be useful and provide a theoretical approach to exploring social actors' narrated experiences.

I started this thesis by detailing the proposals made by David Hargreaves in the period immediately following the Academies Act (2010) and associated white paper (DfE, 2010). He proposed *'building blocks'* associated with *'the benefits of clusters of schools'*, *'local solutions* approach', *'co-construction between* schools' and the concept of *'system leadership'* (Hargreaves, 2010, p5). He later emphasised the need to 'strengthen' these ideas by reinforcing school improvement via professional development through collaborative structures (2012b, 2014). He has been criticised for not providing detail on how *'such "strengthening" would occur and, therefore, how a self-improving system might be brought about'* (Hadfield and Ainscow, 2018, p458). The emergence of TSHs from TSAs can be argued to respond to his suggestions, although participants in this research seemed unconvinced about an emerging parallel approach of TSHs and MATs. Hargreaves also responded to concerns about reproduction of inequality and disadvantage in the school system when, in 2014, he further detailed how a low-performing school might 'benefit' from becoming an *'enforced academy'* (2014, p711). Regrettably though, my research strongly suggests that in the period observed, such

inconsistencies were not resolved, and leaders felt positioned within a wider system that remained fragmented, immature, and therefore unequal.

In the period of this research, having compared participants' conversational responses to Hargreaves' intentions, it seems that leaders in the 'system' suffered hysteresis and that the new fields they inhabited were still immature and uncertain. While joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2011a, 2012b) has contributed to changing system architectures, contingent leadership approach has reflected a pragmatic tendency by leaders to focus in on their own schools and Trusts, while also identifying competitively motivated advantage in looking outward. Their career stories evidence that they have responded to the introduction of the self-improving school system via half-knowing misrecognitions in the decisions they had made and the actions they had taken. I argue that any system built on leader hysteresis and relying on their misrecognitions, surely warrants careful attention and further research.

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9 APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Participant information and consent forms
Appendix 2	Conversational semi-structured interview schedule
Appendix 3	Parent nodes as displayed in NVivo following open coding
Appendix 4	NVivo parent and daughter codes, files and references
Appendix 5	Illustrative examples of NVivo reference collations
Appendix 6	Daughter codes and key themes from axial coding
Appendix 7	10 Key themes with daughter and parent code attribution
Appendix 8	Participants' brief pen-portraits

9.1 Appendix 1. Participant information and consent forms

This appendix contains:

- Initial request letters sent to potential participants with participant information and consent forms.
- The participant information sent to each participant prior to the interview.
- The consent form sent with the participant information prior to the interview and signed by each participant prior to the interview commencing.

Dear <XXXX>,

I write to request your involvement in a piece of research I am conducting as a part of my study for an Education Doctorate (EdD) in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. I am also a member of academic staff (Senior Lecturer) working within the School of Education.

I am conducting research into the 'self-improving school system' in England and am particularly interested in the experiences and perspectives of senior leaders within this system. I have a particular focus on those working within groupings of schools such as Multi Academy Trusts and Teaching School Alliances.

As part of my research I am interviewing a small number of senior leaders in various roles within such organisations. With each participant I use semi-structured interviews to explore aspects of their career 'story', leadership issues and perspectives on a range of policy and practice relating to the self-improving school system.

I write to ask that you might be prepared to contribute some of your time for me to visit to interview you as part of this research (or for us to meet in a mutually convenient location). Such an involvement would take an hour or so in total and would be extremely valuable to my research. I attach a participant information form and a participant consent form, the former to provide additional information on the purpose and approach of my research and the latter for you to complete in due course if you feel prepared to take part.

If you are happy to take part in this study, please could you reply to this letter by email [redacted] in the first instance. If you would like to discuss involvement then please also feel free to email or telephone me on [redacted] or suggest a time and telephone number for me to telephone you.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Simon Asquith.

Doctoral Research Participant Information

Research Project: A case study approach to school system leader positioning within the 'self-improving system' in England.

Research Student: **Simon Asquith**, EdD Student, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Birmingham

Research Supervisor: **Prof Jane Martin**, Professor of Social History of Education, University of Birmingham

Principle Research Question: How do senior leaders in Academy Trusts and/ or Teaching School Alliances view their own agency regarding pupil equality of opportunity within the developing 'self-improving school system' within one Regional Schools Commissioner's region in England?

Introduction to research aims and purpose:

This research examines the personal and professional positioning of senior leaders within what has become known as the 'self-improving school system' in the school sector in England. The research takes this self-improving school system as its object and contextually is concerned with the move towards greater autonomy for individual leaders, their schools and the various groupings of schools within which they sit. It is concerned with sometimes dichotomous or conflicting expectations such as schools needing to be seen to act in both a collaborative and a competitive way, and schools needing to adopt behaviours and assumptions of a market place while at the same time being seen to provide a public service. Of particular relevance are policy-borne structures such as the 'academy school', the 'Teaching School', and the groupings within which they situate themselves, such as Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and Teaching School Alliances (TSAs).

The research is of a case study design and as such takes a small number (5-8) senior schools leaders (MAT Chief Executive Officers / Executive Headteachers/ Teaching School Alliance Lead Headteachers/ Heads of School – any of which may also hold roles such as National/ Local Leader in Education) working within a MAT and/or TSA, and investigates individual leader responses to the above system context. The research case study will locate itself wholly within a close grouping of schools within one Regional Schools Commissioner's region in England. In so-doing it focuses on these school leaders' positioning, ideas and views regarding how (or, the degree to which) their part of the self-improving schools system plays its part in providing equality of opportunity to an effective education across England

What participants will be asked to do:	Participants are asked to meet one-to-one with the researcher for the researcher to undertake a semi-structured interview. The interviewer will have prepared some questions against which verbal responses will be invited. It will be possible to range across themes as relevant and the researcher may ask supplementary or additional extension questions. The style will be focused but informal. It is envisaged that 1 hour may be needed as a maximum.
Capturing of data:	Participant's responses will be recorded on a digital audio recording device with the participant's permission. Recordings will be transcribed following the interview.
Data security and confidentiality:	Audio recordings will be permanently deleted once transcribed. Transcribed copies of the interviews will be stored on an encrypted drive and backed-up on a second encrypted drive. Data analysis tables will be stored in the same way. Only the researcher, supervisor, possible additional University of Birmingham additional internal examiner and possibly University of Birmingham External Examiner will/ might be party to the data. All information discussed and gathered during interviews will be treated as confidential and presented only in a completely anonymised form.
Anonymity:	Unless via mutual agreement post-interview (in which case further participant written consent will be further requested), the participant and the participant's institution will not be identifiable in any resultant written (or otherwise) output.
Ethical issues:	The only potential ethical issue is that the researcher will seek to interview employees of related or the same institutions. It is possible that such participants may be of differing 'seniority' within such institutions and might even be in the same direct line-management structures. However, all interviews will be wholly private and all transcripts and written output will be completely anonymised. If any potentially sensitive perspectives emerge in terms of one participant's professional standing or relationship with another (say differing views on institutional or professional approach) the researcher will ensure that care is taken to preserve anonymity and general or non-specific terminology will be used.
Positionality:	Researcher positionality: The researcher has worked for many years with school leaders in a range of contexts. The general field is therefore well known to the researcher. It is possible that the researcher and a specific participant may know each other via indirect professional contact or by reputation. If so the researcher will declare and consider this in any written output. Participant positionality: It is likely that participants may know or work with each other but interviews will be conducted wholly separately and privately and all output will by anonymised. It is possible that a participant and the researcher may know each other via indirect professional contact or by reputation. If so the researcher will declare and consider this in any written output.
Withdrawal from research:	All participants are welcome to withdraw their participation at any time or to withdraw interview material supplied (prior to any possible ultimate publication of output).

Any questions that potential or actual participants have about this research and its conduct can be sent to:

Student Researcher: Supervisor:

Simon Asquith
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Pritchatts Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT
[redacted]

Prof. Jane Martin
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Pritchatts Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT
[redacted]

Participants must have completed an associated Doctoral Research Consent Form before participation.

Doctoral Research Consent Form

Research Project: A case study approach to school system leader positioning within the 'self-improving system' in England.

Research Student: **Simon Asquith**, EdD Student, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Birmingham

Research Supervisor: **Prof Jane Martin**, Professor of Social History of Education, University of Birmingham

Principle Research Question: How do senior leaders in Academy Trusts and/ or Teaching School Alliances view their own agency regarding pupil equality of opportunity within the developing 'self-improving school system' within one Regional Schools Commissioner's region in England?

Please read the associated 'Doctoral Research Participant Information' sheet.

Participant Name: _____

- I have read the 'Doctoral Research Participation Information' sheet relating to the above detailed research.
- I agree to my participation in this research project.
- I understand that I am able to withdraw my participation at any time or to withdraw interview material supplied (prior to any possible ultimate publication of output).

Participant Signature: _____

Date of Signature: _____

Any questions that potential or actual participants have about this research and its conduct can be sent to:

Student Researcher: Simon Asquith

Supervisor: Prof. Jane Martin

School of Education
University of Birmingham
Pritchatts Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT
[redacted]

School of Education
University of Birmingham
Pritchatts Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT
[redacted]

Participants will be asked to complete an associated Consent Form before participation.

9.2 Appendix 2. Conversational semi-structured interview schedule

This appendix contains:

- The interview schedule used to plan and guide the interviews, containing key starter questions, possible follow-up questions and possible probes as well as general notes to support the interviewer.
- The interview recording form based on the schedule and used to manage and guide the conversational semi-structured interviews. A printed copy was used with each participant on which the interviewer made contextual and interview progress notes as necessary.

The interviews were audio recorded and detailed transcripts created after the interview.

Doctoral Research Interview Schedule

Research Project: A case study approach to school system leader positioning within the 'self-improving system' in England.

Research Student: **Simon Asquith**, EdD Student, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Birmingham

Research Supervisor: **Prof Jane Martin**, Professor of Social History of Education, University of Birmingham

Principle Research Question: How do senior leaders in Academy Trusts and/ or Teaching School Alliances view their own agency regarding pupil equality of opportunity within the developing 'self-improving school system' within two Regional Schools Commissioner's regions in England?

Date & time:	
Location of interview:	
Interview preamble/ introduction indicative script:	Thank you for meeting with me today and for giving-up you time to take part in this research. Thank you also for reading the Participant Information sheet and for signing the Consent Form. As you know I am deeply interested in the changing and developing school *'system'* in England and in how it serves our children and young people. Within this my focus is on those in senior leadership positions and their experiences and perspectives of the *'self-improving school system'* and their place within it. This is why I was particularly keen to interview you. With your permission and as explained in the Participant Information sheet, I would like to audio-record the interview. As you know all data I collect will be held securely and ultimately the data itself will be deleted. As you also know from the participant Information sheet, you are welcome to withdraw from this research at any time.

Pre-interview information	
Participant's Name:	
Participant's Gender:	
Participant's Job Title:	
Participant's 'Institution':	

Some initial questions about you as a participant	
How long have you been in education/ teaching as a career?	
How long have you been in your current position?	

Semi-structured question/ discussion questions/ prompts			
Issue/ Topic	**Key Question Starter**	**Possible Follow-up**	**Probes**
Personal background	Can you tell me a little of your background, perhaps leading to how you came into this profession?	Key moments in background?	Own education. Family background.
Professional background	Can you give some detail of your career?	Key roles held and approximate timings?	Key changes in direction/ breaks.
	When and how did you find yourself progressing towards senior leadership?	Key influences in/ reasons for taking 'opportunities'?	'System' influences? Teaching 'v.' leadership?
	Can you provide detail of your senior leadership positions up to when you took your current role?	Length of time? Influences/ reasons?	'System' influences?
Present role	Please will you give me an overview description of your present role?	Key descriptors of the role? Key responsibilities?	Who is your 'boss'? Multi-faceted issues?
	What is it that motivates you in this role?	Key drivers, philosophy, vision (**sense of mission*)?	*(* children* ** 'moral imperative'* ** notions of equitability)*
	How much agency or 'freedom' do you have in your role?	Notions of 'trust'? Directive/ distributed culture? Centralised/ decentralised culture?	Autonomy? 'Buck-stopping'? Power relations? Trust?
Your institution/ network/ grouping	Can you describe <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?	Members? Trustees? Structures? Partnerships? Size, shape, scale?	Sense of stable-state or expansion/ contraction? No. staff? No. pupils?
	What do you see as the specific characteristics of <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA>?	Aspects of uniqueness? Relationship to sense of mission/ philosophy?	'USP'?
	What are the strengths of <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?	Specific (or not) to its MAT/ TSA status?	*(* partnership/ collaboration* ** economies of scale* ** pastoral* ** attainment/ progress* ** governance* ** autonomy*
	What are the challenges for <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?	Specific (or not) to its MAT/ TSA status?	

			** equitability/ equality)* ** expertise* ** resource* ** community)*
	How do you see your institution's responsibilities to 'all' (as relevant) children?	Is equitability/ equality of access/ opportunity/ outcome/ attainment important to the institution?	Return to mission? Relationship to other 'providers'?
	What are your own main challenges within <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> at present?	Clarity of your own role?	Autonomy? Control/ power to action?
	What do you see as the future for <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA>?	Next 12-24 months? 5 years?	Growth? Mergers? Start-ups?
Self-improving school system & system leadership	How do you see the <MAT/ TSA> within the idea/ concept of a 'self-improving school system'?	MAT/ TSA as part of a 'maturing system architecture' (Hargreaves)?	Maturation?
	What is your perspective on the need for a 'middle-tier' in the (largely) post-LA system?	MATs/ TSAs as a new 'middle-tier'? Role of RSCs?	Consistency/ inconsistency? Equitability?
	What are your feelings on where responsibilities for 'provision' lie within the education system?	Between Government (DfE & NSC) (& Ofsted?)/ Local Gov't/ RSCs/ System Leaders/ sub-system leaders?	Clear 'lines'?
	To what degree do you feel that people in your 'type' of role have genuine agency within the 'self-improving school system'?	Is the idea of 'agency' 'systemically'/ culturally accepted across the 'system'?	Autonomy? 'Buck-stopping'? Power relations? Trust?
	What are your views on transparency, choice and clarity of the system to staff, parents and pupils?	Is there real choice in your area? Do your pupils' parents understand your organisation? Does your staff-body understand your organisation?	Communication strategy? Does it matter?
	How do you see the 'system's' responsibilities to 'all' children?	Is equitability/ equality of access/ opportunity/ outcome/ attainment important across the 'system'?	Defining 'improvement' in the system/
A return to your own role	Finally, how do you see your role and your career within the emergent and developing 'self-improving school system'?	You as a system leader? Your own agency?	Rewards? Aspirations? Concerns?

* note: prompts marked with asterisk will be explored as far as possible without 'leading' the participant by using the words or phrases directly.

Interview conclusion:	Thank you for your time and for your frankness and openness. Once again, please be assured that the recording and eventual transcript will be treated according to the confidentiality and anonymity undertakings as referred to in the Participant Information sheet. Do please get in touch with me if you would like to discuss this research further.

Doctoral Research Interview Schedule

Research Project: A case study approach to school system leader positioning within the 'self-improving system' in England.

Research Student: **Simon Asquith**, EdD Student, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Birmingham

Research Supervisor: **Prof Jane Martin**, Professor of Social History of Education, University of Birmingham

Principle Research Question: How do senior leaders in Academy Trusts and/ or Teaching School Alliances view their own agency regarding pupil equality of opportunity within the developing 'self-improving school system' within one Regional Schools Commissioner's region in England?

Date & time:	
Location of interview:	
Interview preamble/ introduction indicative script:	Thank you for meeting with me today and for giving-up you time to take part in this research. Thank you also for reading the Participant Information sheet and for signing the Consent Form. As you know I am deeply interested in the changing and developing school *'system'* in England and in how it serves our children and young people. Within this my focus is on those in senior leadership positions and their experiences and perspectives of the *'self-improving school system'* and their place within it. This is why I was particularly keen to interview you. With your permission and as explained in the Participant Information sheet, I would like to audio-record the interview. As you know all data I collect will be held securely and ultimately the data itself will be deleted. As you also know from the participant Information sheet, you are welcome to withdraw from this research at any time.

Pre-interview information	
Participant's Name:	
Participant's Gender:	
Participant's Job Title:	
Participant's 'Institution':	

Some initial questions about you as a participant			
How long have you been in education/ teaching as a career?			
How long have you been in your current position?			
Semi-structured question/ discussion questions/ prompts			
Issue/ Topic	**Key Question Starter**	**Possible Follow-up**	**Probes**
Personal background	Can you tell me a little of your background, perhaps leading to how you came into this profession?	Key moments in background?	Own education. Family background.
	1/1 - 1/6 - 1/21		
Professional background	Can you give some detail of your career?	Key roles held and approximate timings?	Key changes in direction/ breaks.
	1/3 - 2/6 - 2/21		
	When and how did you find yourself progressing towards senior leadership?	Key influences in/ reasons for taking 'opportunities'?	'System' influences? Teaching 'v.' leadership?
	2/3 - 2/6 - 3/21		

	Can you provide detail of your senior leadership positions up to when you took your current role?	Length of time? Influences/ reasons?	'System' influences?
	3/3 - 2/6 - 4/21		
Present role	Please will you give me an overview description of your present role?	Key descriptors of the role? Key responsibilities?	Who is your 'boss'? Multi-faceted issues?
	1/3 - 3/6 - 5/21		
	What is it that motivates you in this role?	Key drivers, philosophy, vision (**sense of mission*)?	*(* children* ** 'moral imperative'* ** notions of equitability)*
	2/3 - 3/6 - 6/21		

	How much agency or 'freedom' do you have in your role?	Notions of 'trust'? Directive/ distributed culture? Centralised/ decentralised culture?	Autonomy? 'Buck-stopping'? Power relations? Trust?
	3/3 - 3/6 - 7/21		
Your institution/ network/ grouping	Can you describe <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?	Members? Trustees? Structures? Partnerships? Size, shape, scale?	Sense of stable-state or expansion/ contraction? No. staff? No. pupils?
	1/7 - 4/6 - 8/21		
	What do you see as the specific characteristics of <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA>?	Aspects of uniqueness? Relationship to sense of mission/ philosophy?	'USP'?
	2/7 - 4/6 - 9/21		

What are the strengths of <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?	Specific (or not) to its MAT/ TSA status?	*(* partnership/ collaboration * economies of scale * pastoral * attainment/ progress * governance * autonomy * equitability/ equality) * expertise * resource * community)*
3/7 - 4/6 - 10/21		
What are the challenges for <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> as an organisation?	Specific (or not) to its MAT/ TSA status?	
4/7 - 4/6 - 11/21		
How do you see your institution's responsibilities to 'all' (as relevant) children?	Is equitability/ equality of access/ opportunity/ outcome/ attainment important to the institution?	Return to mission? Relationship to other 'providers'?
5/7 - 4/6 - 12/21		
What are your own main challenges within <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA> at present?	Clarity of your own role?	Autonomy? Control/ power to action?
6/7 - 4/6 - 13/21		

CONT: **Your institution/ network/ grouping**			
	What do you see as the future for <name of institution/ MAT/ TSA>?	Next 12-24 months? 5 years?	Growth? Mergers? Start-ups?
	7/7 - 4/6 - 14/21		
Self-improving school system & system leadership	How do you see the <MAT/ TSA> within the idea/ concept of a 'self-improving school system'?	MAT/ TSA as part of a 'maturing system architecture' (Hargreaves)?	Maturation?
	1/6 - 5/6 - 15/21		
	What is your perspective on the need for a 'middle-tier' in the (largely) post-LA system?	MATs/ TSAs as a new 'middle-tier'? Role of RSCs?	Consistency/ inconsistency? Equitability?
	2/6 - 5/6 - 16/21		

What are your feelings on where responsibilities for 'provision' lie within the education system?	Between Government (DfE & NSC) (& Ofsted?)/ Local Gov't/ RSCs/ System Leaders/ sub-system leaders?	Clear 'lines'?
3/6 - 5/6 - 17/21		
To what degree do you feel that people in your 'type' of role have genuine agency within the 'self-improving school system'?	Is the idea of 'agency' 'systemically'/ culturally accepted across the 'system'?	Autonomy? 'Buck-stopping'? Power relations? Trust?
4/6 - 5/6 - 18/21		
What are your views on transparency, choice and clarity of the system to staff, parents and pupils?	Is there real choice in your area? Do your pupils' parents understand your organisation? Does your staff-body understand your organisation?	Communication strategy? Does it matter?
5/6 - 5/6 - 19/21		

CONT: **Self-improving school system & system leadership**			
	How do you see the 'system's' responsibilities to 'all' children?	Is equitability/ equality of access/ opportunity/ outcome/ attainment important across the 'system'?	Defining 'improvement' in the system/
	6/6 - 5/6 - 20/21		
A return to your own role	Finally, how do you see your role and your career within the emergent and developing 'self-improving school system'?	You as a system leader? Your own agency?	Rewards? Aspirations? Concerns?
	1/1 - 6/6 - 21/21		

* note: prompts marked with asterisk will be explored as far as possible without 'leading' the participant by using the words or phrases directly.

Interview conclusion:	Thank you for your time and for your frankness and openness. Once again, please be assured that the recording and eventual transcript will be treated according to the confidentiality and anonymity undertakings as referred to in the Participant Information sheet. Do please get in touch with me if you would like to discuss this research further.

Other Notes:

9.3 Appendix 3. Parent nodes as displayed in NVivo following open coding

Nodes

Name	Files	References
Geography	19	105
Middle-tier	17	86
Role Milestones	21	239
Role complexity	19	45
MAT - TSA Relationship Between	18	98
Networked individual working	18	51
Resource	18	111
Key player importance	13	31
Transparency & understanding	17	65
Cross-organisational structuring	19	60
Conflicts intra-organisationally	14	27
Role perspectives	19	114
Roles- Key references	21	188
Leadership Challenges - Organisational	17	67
Shared values and-or vision	17	78
School-to-school support & development	18	84
System change - Academisation	16	102
Competition v collaboration	19	99
System Maturity	18	72
Marketisation	17	59
Sense of purpose	18	85
'System Led' idea - Critiquing it	14	57
Agency - of organisations	19	113
Agency - of individual	21	160
Agency themes	21	148
MAT size and growth	17	99
Governance & Scrutiny	16	71
Understanding System Leadership	17	82
System structural robustness & fragility	20	141
TSA facets and strengths	17	197
System structural equity	18	46
Gender and school system leadership	3	6

9.4 Appendix 4. NVivo parent and daughter codes, files and references

NVivo report of all parent codes and associated daughter codes with number of files (participant transcripts) and references (discreet participant references) coded to each.

Name	Files	References
Agency - of individual	21	160
Agency - Head or DofTS to CEO-EH Relationship	9	23
Agency in own role	17	36
Agency to keep own schools as focus	11	20
Autonomy - rejecting Exec Head model	3	6
Autonomy - rejecting Head of School model	4	5
Autonomy - staff losing it when academised	3	3
Career mobility challenge to senior leaders	5	9
Deployed to Trust not School	2	2
Experience counts	8	15
National-Govt Connections	3	6
Planning own leadership career	15	30
Safety blanket HoS v. HT	2	5
Agency - of organisations	19	113
Agency as based on trust & mutuality	7	8
Governing body relinquishing or celebrating aspects of new roles	1	3
MAT agency in sponsoring others	7	13
MAT agency within regional system	7	9
Organisation autonomy reliant on success	12	23
Organisational agency within MATs at different scales	11	18
Organisational autonomy	13	27
Surrender of - Support for back-office functions	1	4
Surrender of - Support for curriculum	2	5
TSA - schools having to meet criteria	2	3
Agency themes	21	148
Accountability-Performativity Agenda	8	11
Agency - challenges & conflicts	12	17
Agentic responsibility of leaders to others	13	31
Autonomy as a myth	1	1
Autonomy-standardisation dichotomy	9	11

Name	Files	References
Being done to v Doing with	13	21
Governmental bureaucracy	8	8
Price of autonomy - exposure	1	1
Resource blocking agency	4	5
System confusion blocking agency	8	10
System leadership agency	11	32
Competition v collaboration	19	99
Collaboration - Group-group economy of scale	3	5
Collaborative approach to ITE	4	6
Collaborative competition	7	13
Competition for pupils locally	6	10
Competition in sponsorship process	2	2
Cross-region collaborative approach	5	9
Local school to school relationship change	9	13
MAT - LA competition	13	18
Overt MAT competition	2	2
Regional v National Trusts - Competition or not	4	8
Safe relationships v Innovative developments	3	3
Support examples beyond region	1	1
TS to TS collab comp over bids	2	4
TSA-TSA competing rather than collaborating	3	5
Conflicts intra-organisationally	14	27
In-MAT school improvement processes	5	8
In-MAT standardisation v school autonomy	9	11
In-MAT threat to power through growth	2	3
ITE - School Improvement Conflict	2	3
ITE - Students & Staffing Conflict	1	2
Cross-organisational structuring	19	60
CPD - TSA cross-school working	6	7
Cross-MAT 6th Forms	1	1
Diocese church school relationships	9	16
Faith & diocese schools in MAT	1	1
In-MAT structural effectiveness and systems	8	14
Schools positioning within MAT	6	8
SCITT TSA cross-school working	5	11
TSA - not focused on ITE	2	2

Name	Files	References
Gender and school system leadership	3	6
Female School Leaders - Impact of	3	3
Maternity Issues and School Leaders	1	2
Women leaders - Imposter Syndrome	1	1
Geography	19	105
Diocesan 'safe harbour' school	1	3
Geographical sustainability - staff retention	3	4
Hub model - MAT	7	10
Importance of geography - TSA structure	6	15
Importance of proximity - MAT structure	10	19
IT as MAT comms tool	1	1
Mission to area or region	9	16
Multiple RSC regions	2	2
Potential for regional trust-trust working	2	3
Regional TSA Groupings	5	9
Relevance of Local Auth boundaries	3	3
Rural School Challenges - Aspirations	3	3
Rural School Challenges - Resource	5	8
Support easy out of region	3	4
TS growing own TS hubs in MAT	2	3
TSA as hub within MAT hubs	1	2
Governance & Scrutiny	16	71
Convertion process issues	2	2
Governance - governance leadership impact	6	8
Governance inhibiting system change	3	4
Identification of Members (MATs)	3	3
Identification of Trustees or Governors	5	8
Importance of governance structures	12	17
Local area boards and local governance	3	6
Members' skills	2	2
Policy solutions within MATs	1	1
Scrutiny, monitoring & inspection	6	11
Senior leader pay	2	2
TSA - Boards & Strategic Partners	5	6
Key player importance	13	31
Key leader impact on career	12	26

Name	Files	References
Others' referring to CEO-EH views	3	5
Leadership Challenges - Organisational	17	67
Balance between structural effort and strategic work	5	8
Change management & leadership	7	11
Countering media sound bite stories	3	3
Leading for future scenarios	7	10
Promotional & Staff development within grouping	11	17
Succession planning	10	18
Marketisation	17	59
Data as straightjacket	2	3
Education - Business relationship	2	4
Employment of Industry e.g. Bid-writers	1	3
Lack of preparation for business & bid leadership	6	12
Marketing to compete for pupils locally	3	4
Reliance on funding streams	8	12
Schools as businesses	5	14
Sponsorship of schools	4	5
Working with national-regional CPD providers	1	2
MAT - TSA Relationship Between	18	98
Accessing TSA by joining MAT	2	3
MAT being in TSA gives view of other MATs	2	2
MAT-TSA changing approach to School Improvement	6	8
MAT-TSA Others' understanding	5	8
MAT-TSA Relationship	18	55
National MAT-TSA Relationship Views	5	6
TSA as alternative to MAT	2	3
TSA as entry route to MAT	5	8
TSA as key or cheap MAT teacher supply	4	5
MAT size and growth	17	99
Growth - Primary & Secondary joined-up	9	18
MAT - consideration of free school satellite	1	1
MAT - Growth agenda	14	45
MAT size	13	31
MAT-MAT mergers as future	2	4
Middle-tier	17	86
Academised Middle-tier as Govt Agenda	9	12

Name	Files	References
Consolidation of school groupings	6	9
Democratic accountability	6	8
Middle tier - LA and SAT continuing role in	11	18
Middle tier - TSs Hub Model	5	10
Middle tier - via MAT-MAT working	5	8
Middle Tier - via TSA-TSA work	4	7
Middle tier too muddled	4	6
Missing overview at County-Regional level	5	8
Networked individual working	18	51
Own positioning affecting MAT-TSA relations	4	5
Providing networking opportunities for staff	6	7
Role relying on relationships and networks	12	17
Working beyond own school	11	22
Resource	18	111
Core funding - structures relying on	8	14
Due diligence in accepting academy	3	7
Market - Selling product to others	5	5
Market - Selling 'product' v quid pro quo	5	9
MAT - Internal Economies of Group-Working	3	6
Resource capacity for system work	12	26
Resource challenges	9	17
Resources - standardisation relationship	4	4
TSA - Resourcing & Internal Market	8	23
Role complexity	19	45
Complexity of senior leadership roles	14	23
Confusion over own role	1	1
Fundamental tenets of sytem leadership	6	7
Issues around clarity of HoS-EH collegial approach	1	2
System Leadership as Prim & Sec	7	12
Role Milestones	21	239
Early career - earning spurs	14	27
Early Motivations	14	20
Exec Leadership CPD-Courses	2	2
First Leadership Roles	21	48
First System Leadership Roles	14	25
Forming own MAT or TSA or other grouping	5	8

Name	Files	References
Future role - ambition and advancement	21	31
Initial Introduction to TSs	5	6
Inspirations to teach	5	6
Key support to other schools	4	7
Legacy planning issues	10	16
Overcoming challenge	6	11
Own career mutual manipulation	7	11
Pre-education careers	4	4
Self-awareness in making own career decisons	1	3
Significant career background within present Trust	7	12
TS - Background in HE ITE	2	2
Role perspectives	19	114
Business accumen	1	7
Detailed challenges in way of strategy	5	5
Importance of developing own team	5	7
Imposter syndrome - self-doubt	5	9
Keeping focus on own school	7	12
Leadership styles	10	21
Leadership v Teaching tension	8	11
Limited actual change at local level	1	2
Mentorship - importance to career	3	5
Misplaced ambitions & roles	1	1
Pressure to improve school(s)	4	4
Principle motivations	11	19
Skilling-up future senior leaders	8	11
Roles- Key references	21	188
AHT - DHT Roles	2	5
CEO Role	7	20
Diocesan Leadership role	2	3
Director of Teaching School	9	33
Executive Head-Principal	11	27
Head of School	5	11
Headteacher-Principal	12	28
Local School Grouping Leadership Roles	3	6
Nat Schools Comm role	1	2
NLE Role	7	16

Name	Files	References
Ofsted inspector	1	1
RSC role	11	24
SLE... and AST Role	8	11
TSC	1	1
School-to-school support & development	18	84
Key school-to-school support leadership activity	11	24
Primary-secondary sch-sch support activity	5	10
Resource Capacity for Sch-to-Sch Support	10	17
Risk in supporting weak schools	7	17
School-to-school being 2-way	6	9
School-to-school support as long-standing	5	7
Sense of purpose	18	85
Altruistic motivations	5	7
Children at centre of endeavour	13	28
Moral purpose	13	25
Regional improvement mission	6	14
School Improvement - principle motivation	6	6
Sense of 'duty' to rescue schools	2	3
Teaching & Learning as critical	2	2
Shared values and-or vision	17	78
Conistent & Enduring MAT values	10	10
Cross-system Shared Vision & values	8	10
Data v values led	2	2
Idea of school or grouping as family	2	6
Importance of vision and values	3	5
In-MAT shared values	12	17
National & Regional Trust Values alignment	4	5
Needs for Trust	9	14
Vision for MAT	8	9
System change - Academisation	16	102
Academisation - HTB & RSC roles	11	20
Academisation - Moral Imperative to support failing	7	10
Academisation - Motives for forming MAT	6	15
Academisation - support v forced	4	5
Academy project - perspectives on	12	23
Isolated school needing MAT security	1	4

Name	Files	References
LA supporting local v national MATs	2	2
Ofsted as a result of academising	3	4
Providing conversion into own MAT	2	2
Providing sponsorship into own MAT	7	12
SAT becoming MAT	3	3
System approaches not involving academisation	1	2
'System Led' idea - Critiquing it	14	57
Actually - little changes	1	3
Over-Fragmentation in system	5	10
Regional solutions parallel with MATs	3	10
System led - Expertise capacity	9	15
System led v nationally led	8	12
System 'player' - not playing the game	4	7
System Maturity	18	72
Diocesan 'failings' in regional system structure	9	11
Frustrations over system immaturity	2	9
Future - Full Academisation	3	4
Future - MAT to MAT support	3	6
Future - TSA to TSA support	4	8
Importance of newer school leaders in system	2	2
MATs - Primary feeders important	5	8
MATs as through-age 3-18	1	5
Maturity - Regional v National Trusts	5	6
Misunderstandings as bars to engaging	2	2
Primary as non-academised	5	6
Selection - system implications	3	3
SEN Resource - Academies v Local Auth LA	1	2
System structural equity	18	46
Equity and quality across system	16	25
Equity in student experience across MAT	4	4
Ideology of small State v Indiv Child Equity	7	7
Variable quality in system - TSs	4	9
System structural robustness & fragility	20	141
Competition in ITE impacting sch-led providers	2	4
Concerns about Gov't Assumptions	5	7
Danger of stagnation via inward-view	2	2

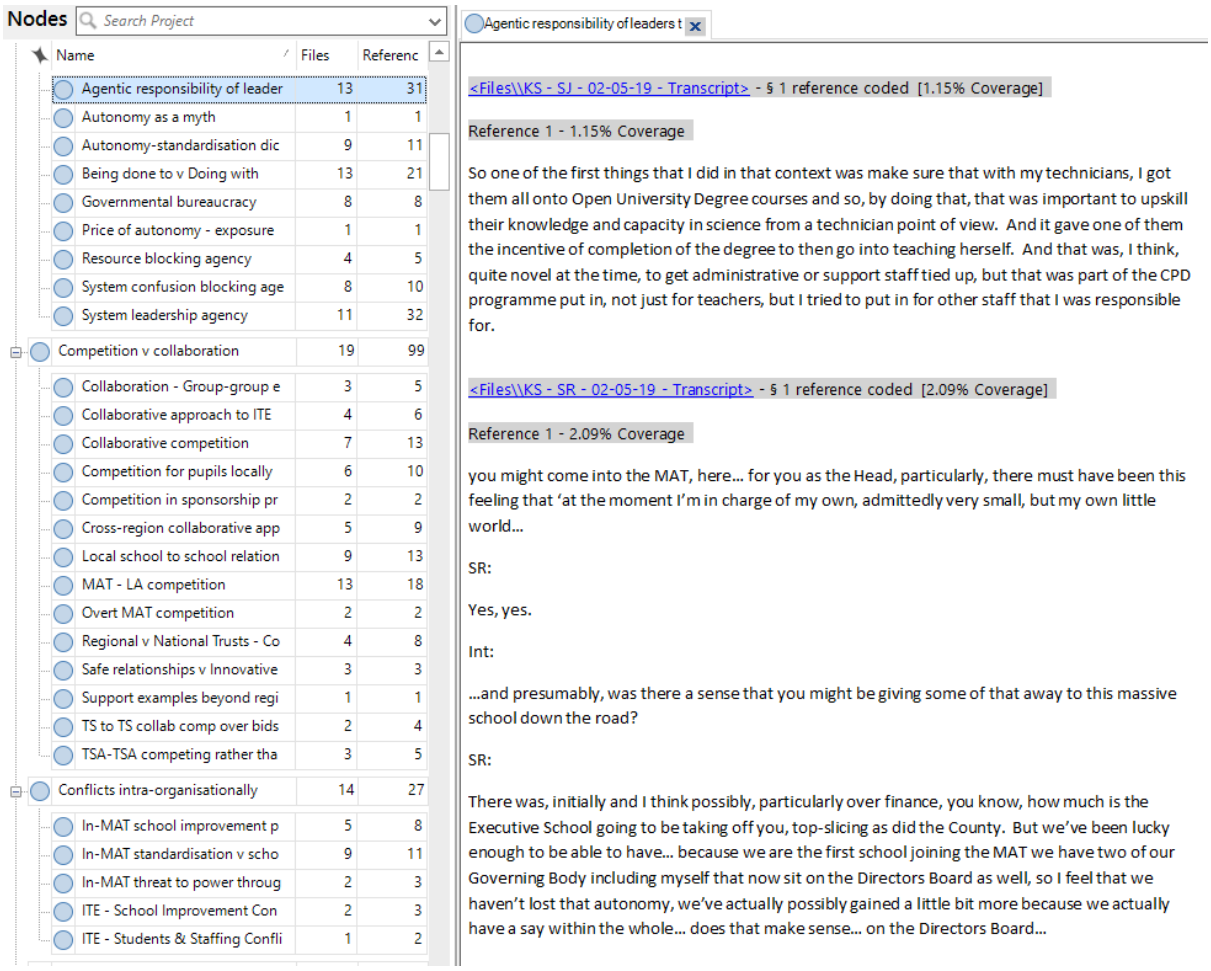
Name	Files	References
Disconnect - MAT growth & Local-Regional System Solutions	4	5
Fragility of structures in system	12	19
Handling transference from failed MATs	1	2
Impact of SCITT within TS	7	14
Own school's cache- threat to other schools	3	7
Poor communications in system	6	8
Preference for out-of-own-area working	1	1
Primary lack of system-engagement	6	7
Protection of MAT via due diligence	4	8
Risk governance within MAT	8	17
Sufficiency of senior leaders	6	9
System - TSA solution rather than academy	2	5
TSs - Demise of	4	8
TSs - Expansion out of area	1	2
TSs - Vulnerability based on Maintaining Scrutiny Rating	2	3
Weak schools hiding from support	6	7
Workload as sector issue	2	5
Transparency & understanding	17	65
MAT - Parental understanding	9	15
MAT - Staff understanding	9	13
MAT - Student understanding	4	4
Research evidence as important	3	3
School understanding of SiSS and Trusts	2	2
System - Transparency in Academy brokering	4	5
TSA - governor-trustee understanding	1	1
TSA - Parental understanding	5	7
TSA - Staff understanding	7	12
TSA - Student understanding	3	3
TSA facets and strengths	17	197
Importance of joint-bidding to TSA	2	6
Importance of support for NQT & RQT etc	2	3
NQT Appropriate Body status	1	1
Role in NPQ programmes	1	1
Sch-to-Sch Support and TSA role	9	19
TS - LA relationship	5	10
TSA - basis in relationships & partnerships	9	32

Name	Files	References
TSA - Growth of primary ITE in TSA	1	2
TSA - importance of brand	2	2
TSA - importance of CPD	11	24
TSA - importance of ITE or SCITT kudos & success	9	21
TSA - National & Governmental Coordination	6	11
TSA - principle-key activities	8	15
TSA - School improvement	9	17
TSA - working with Bid Writers	3	7
TSA - working with Commercial Providers	3	6
TSA Size and Growth	8	19
Understanding System Leadership	17	82
Approaches to system leadership	7	18
Creating roles for the future	4	6
Difficult leadership decisions - staffing & pupil behaviour	1	4
Early system support work	7	9
Need for aligned philosophies & motivations	4	5
Single to Cross-schools system leadership	11	17
System Leaders as Teachers v. Non Teachers	2	2
Understanding Leadership Importance in System Change	12	20

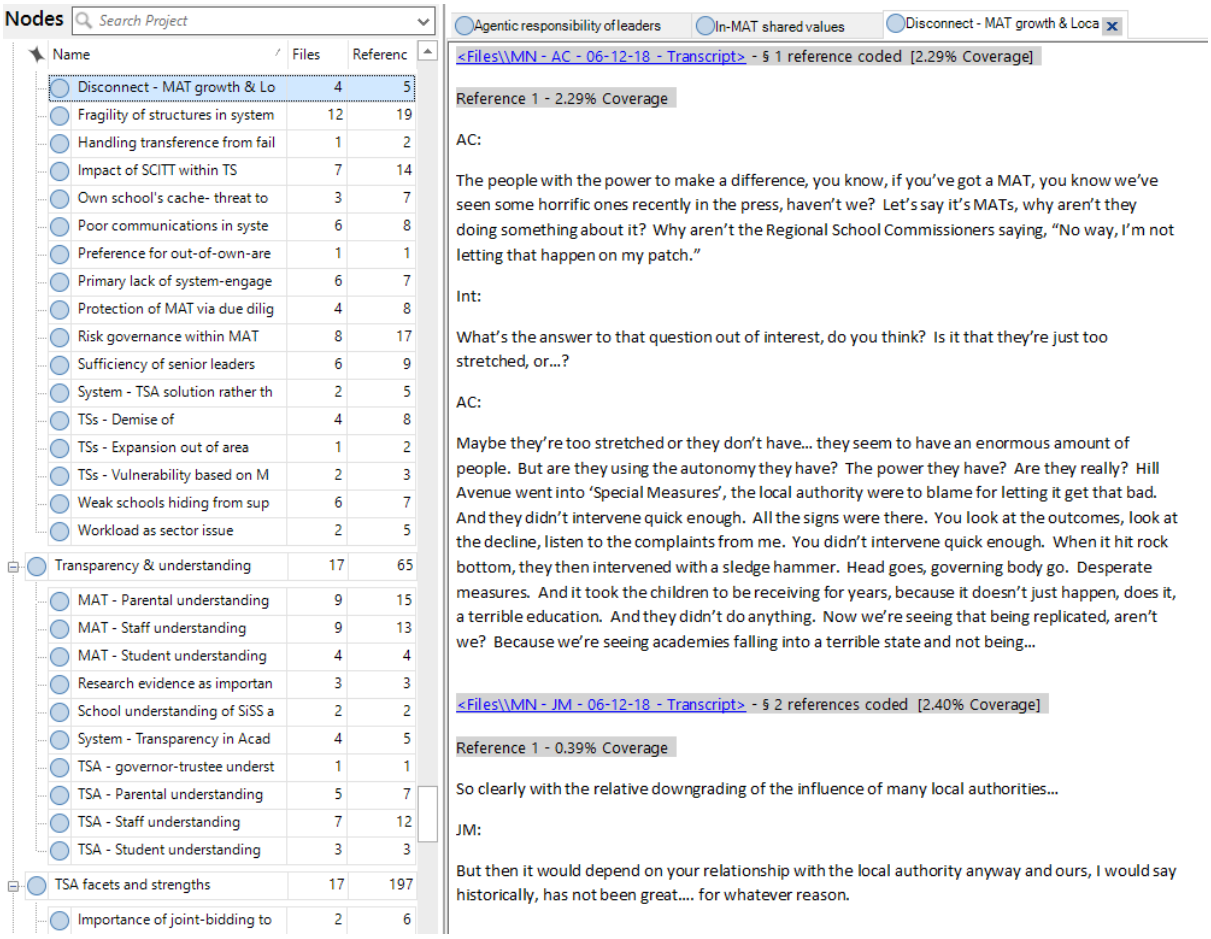
9.5 Appendix 5. Illustrative examples of NVivo reference collations

Three illustrative examples of transcript reference collations coded by Daughter Code as displayed in NVivo.

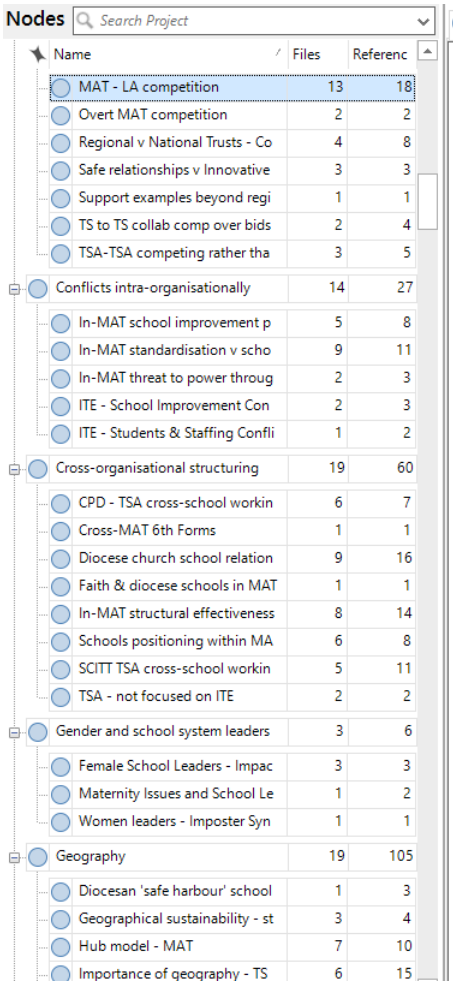
i. Excerpt from Daughter Code 'Agentic responsibility of leaders to others'



ii. Excerpt from Daughter Code 'Disconnect – MAT growth & local-regional system solutions'



iii. Excerpt from Daughter Code 'MAT – LA competition'



MAT - LA competition

<Files\\AT - NW - 29-03-19 - Transcript> - § 1 reference coded [0.99% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.99% Coverage

To what degree might it ultimately result in a more equitable system than perhaps let's say what we had in, we might argue that we had in decades gone by?

NL:

That's a difficult question isn't it, really? Because I think, unless the competitive nature of MAT to MAT working and Local Authorities etc. goes, then that's going to be very difficult to achieve, I think. Because there is still a massively competitive nature to MAT working. That actually schools are vying for schools to join their Multi Academy Trusts, for different reasons.

<Files\\AT - RG - 29-03-19 - Transcript> - § 2 references coded [2.15% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.15% Coverage

I think there is only so long you can carry on working in a system less system because it's too disjointed. And therefore, in some areas of the country you've got very strong local authorities still. In areas where you've got strong MATs and strong Teaching Schools and I whilst I think we have moved as a sector, it's different in some areas but I think as a sector, we are far more collaborative and competitive than we might have been nine years ago. But that said, there are tensions where that's happened. So my logic is, that's the direction of travel. And, as I said, it doesn't matter what government is in place, I think it's inevitable.

Reference 2 - 0.99% Coverage

I think Single Academy Trusts are interesting because you have got those Single Academy Trusts working really, really well in Local Authorities where there aren't Local Authorities and therefore are providing challenge back to Regional School Commissioners...why should I? That sort of policy change will be significant. Whoever has the guts to change policy.

Int:

Yes, quite. And indeed, Primary, where we've still got a significant number that haven't done it.

RG:

Yeh. But it's interesting that that's the case where there is still a Local Authority.

9.6 Appendix 6. Daughter codes and key themes from axial coding

The 64 Daughter Codes with 15 or more references attributed to them and the key themes to which they were allocated in the first stage of axial coding

Daughter Codes with at least 15 allocated references from the transcripts	Total No of references allocated to Daughter Code	Key themes that emerged through the first stage of axial coding
MAT-TSA Relationship	55	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
First Leadership Roles	48	Career story as rationale for leaders' current positioning
MAT - Growth agenda	45	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
Agency in own role	36	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
System leadership agency	32	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
TSA - basis in relationships & partnerships	32	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Future role - ambition and advancement	31	Leaders' perspectives on their futures
MAT size	31	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
Agentic responsibility of leaders to others	31	Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence
Planning own leadership career	30	Leaders' perspectives on their futures
Children at centre of endeavour	28	The SISS and career rationale
Early career - earning spurs	27	Career story as rationale for leaders' current positioning
Organisational autonomy	27	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Key leader impact on career	26	Career story as rationale for leaders' current positioning
Resource capacity for system work	26	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
Equity and quality across system	25	The SISS and career rationale
First System Leadership Roles	25	Career story as rationale for leaders' current positioning
Moral purpose	25	The SISS and career rationale
Key school-to-school support leadership activity	24	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures

TSA - importance of CPD	24	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Complexity of senior leadership roles	23	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Organisation autonomy reliant on success	23	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Academy project - perspectives on	23	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
Agency - Head or DofTS to CEO-EH Relationship	23	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
TSA - Resourcing & Internal Market	23	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
Working beyond own school	22	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Being done to v Doing with	21	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Leadership styles	21	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
TSA - importance of ITE or SCITT kudos & success	21	Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of maturity
Early Motivations	20	Career story as rationale for leaders' current positioning
Understanding Leadership Importance in System Change	20	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
Agency to keep own schools as focus	20	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Academisation - HTB & RSC roles	20	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
Fragility of structures in system	19	Fragility and the integrity of the system
Principle motivations	19	The SISS and career rationale
Importance of proximity - MAT structure	19	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
Sch-to-Sch Support and TSA role	19	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
TSA Size and Growth	19	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
MAT - LA competition	18	Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of maturity
Organisational agency within MATs at different scales	18	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system
Middle tier - LA and SAT continuing role in	18	Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of maturity
Succession planning	18	Leaders’ perspectives on their futures
Growth - Primary & Secondary joined-up	18	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition
Approaches to system leadership	18	Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system

Role relying on relationships and networks	17	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Agency - challenges & conflicts	17	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
In-MAT shared values	17	The SISS and career rationale
Importance of governance structures	17	Fragility and the integrity of the system
Single to Cross-schools system leadership	17	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Promotional & Staff development within grouping	17	Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence
Resource Capacity for Sch-to-Sch Support	17	Fragility and the integrity of the system
TSA - School improvement	17	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Resource challenges	17	Fragility and the integrity of the system
Risk governance within MAT	17	Fragility and the integrity of the system
Risk in supporting weak schools	17	Fragility and the integrity of the system
Legacy planning issues	16	Leaders' perspectives on their futures
Diocese church school relationships	16	Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of maturity
Mission to area or region	16	Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of maturity
MAT - Parental understanding	15	Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence
System led - Expertise capacity	15	Fragility and the integrity of the system
TSA - principle-key activities	15	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Experience counts	15	The complex realities of individual school leader agency
Academisation - Motives for forming MAT	15	Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures
Importance of geography - TSA structure	15	Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition

9.7 Appendix 7. 10 Key themes with daughter and parent code attribution

The 10 Key Themes with detail of the Daughter Codes and original Parent Codes attributed to each

Note: In the second stage of axial coding, references attributed to the Daughter Codes in each of these Key Theme tables (Daughter Codes with 15 or more references attributed) were re-examined enabling detailed findings to emerge.

Leadership in complex MAT-TSA structures

(See section 6.1.1)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
MAT-TSA Relationship	**55**	18	MAT - TSA Relationship Between
TSA - basis in relationships & partnerships	**32**	9	TSA facets and strengths
Key school-to-school support leadership activity	**24**	11	School-to-school support & development
TSA - importance of CPD	**24**	11	TSA facets and strengths
Complexity of senior leadership roles	**23**	14	Role complexity
Agency - Head or DofTS to CEO-EH Relationship	**23**	9	Agency - of individual
Sch-to-Sch Support and TSA role	**19**	9	TSA facets and strengths
Role relying on relationships and networks	**17**	12	Networked individual working
TSA - School improvement	**17**	9	TSA facets and strengths
TSA - principle-key activities	**15**	8	TSA facets and strengths
Academisation - Motives for forming MAT	**15**	6	System change - Academisation

Career story as rationale for leaders' current positioning

(See section 5.2.1)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
First Leadership Roles	**48**	21	Role Milestones
Early career - earning spurs	**27**	14	Role Milestones
Key leader impact on career	**26**	12	Key player importance
First System Leadership Roles	**25**	14	Role Milestones
Early Motivations	**20**	14	Role Milestones

Leader rationales for school grouping growth, shape and competition

(See section 6.1.2)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
MAT - Growth agenda	**45**	14	MAT size and growth
MAT size	**31**	13	MAT size and growth
TSA - Resourcing & Internal Market	**23**	8	Resource
Importance of proximity - MAT structure	**19**	10	Geography
TSA Size and Growth	**19**	8	TSA facets and strengths
Growth - Primary & Secondary joined-up	**18**	9	MAT size and growth
Importance of geography - TSA structure	**15**	6	Geography

The complex realities of individual school leader agency

(See section 5.1.1)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
Agency in own role	**36**	17	Agency - of individual
Organisational autonomy	**27**	13	Agency - of organisations
Organisation autonomy reliant on success	**23**	12	Agency - of organisations
Working beyond own school	**22**	11	Networked individual working
Being done to v Doing with	**21**	13	Agency themes
Leadership styles	**21**	10	Role perspectives
Agency to keep own schools as focus	**20**	11	Agency - of individual
Agency - challenges & conflicts	**17**	12	Agency themes
Single to Cross-schools system leadership	**17**	11	Understanding System Leadership
Experience counts	**15**	8	Agency - of individual

Structural constraints on leadership within the wider system

(See section 6.2.1)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
System leadership agency	**32**	11	Agency themes
Resource capacity for system work	**26**	12	Resource
Academy project - perspectives on	**23**	12	System change - Academisation
Understanding Leadership Importance in System Change	**20**	12	Understanding System Leadership
Academisation - HTB & RSC roles	**20**	11	System change - Academisation
Organisational agency within MATs at different scales	**18**	11	Agency - of organisations
Approaches to system leadership	**18**	7	Understanding System Leadership

Leaders' perspectives on their futures

(See section 5.2.3)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
Future role - ambition and advancement	**31**	21	Role Milestones
Planning own leadership career	**30**	15	Agency - of individual
Succession planning	**18**	10	Leadership Challenges - Organisational
Legacy planning issues	**16**	10	Role Milestones

Agentic impact of school leaders on those they lead and influence

(See section 5.1.2)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
Agentic responsibility of leaders to others	**31**	13	Agency themes
Promotional & Staff development within grouping	**17**	11	Leadership Challenges - Organisational
MAT - Parental understanding	**15**	9	Transparency & understanding

The SISS and career rationale

(See section 5.2.2)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
Children at centre of endeavour	**28**	13	Sense of purpose
Equity and quality across system	**25**	16	System structural equity
Moral purpose	**25**	13	Sense of purpose
Principle motivations	**19**	11	Role perspectives
In-MAT shared values	**17**	12	Shared values and-or vision

Leader concerns about the middle-tier and associated issues of system maturity

(See section 6.2.2)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
TSA - importance of ITE or SCITT kudos & success	**21**	9	TSA facets and strengths
MAT - LA competition	**18**	13	Competition v collaboration
Middle-tier - LA and SAT continuing role in	**18**	11	Middle-tier
Diocese church school relationships	**16**	9	Cross-organisational structuring
Mission to area or region	**16**	9	Geography

Fragility and the integrity of the system

(See section 6.2.3)

Daughter Codes attributed to this grouping (with at least 15 allocated References)	Total No of References allocated to Daughter Code	No of Participants who made References allocated to Daughter Code	Parent Code from which Daughter Code emerged
Fragility of structures in system	**19**	12	System structural robustness & fragility
Importance of governance structures	**17**	12	Governance & Scrutiny
Resource Capacity for Sch-to-Sch Support	**17**	10	School-to-school support & development
Resource challenges	**17**	9	Resource
Risk governance within MAT	**17**	8	System structural robustness & fragility
Risk in supporting weak schools	**17**	7	School-to-school support & development
System led - Expertise capacity	**15**	9	'System Led' idea - Critiquing it

9.8 Appendix 8. Participants' brief pen-portraits

Participant pseudonym	Participant brief pen-portraits
Diane West Midlands (group 1)	This accomplished and nationally known MAT CEO and Executive Principal runs one of the region's longest-established MATs. She has had her entire career in the schools that form the MAT she now leads and has held a range of positions within the lead school as well as an AST role. Her first headship role was to take over and improve a failing school which the MAT sponsored and which is now successfully operating under a changed name. She has moved the MAT to accepting schools in the wider region and has developed a hub-based approach to doing this, for which the MAT is now well known.
Maria West Midlands (group 1)	This Executive Primary Principal within the MAT Diane leads originally planned to be a professional musician but having completed a PGCE moved into secondary music teaching, head of department and other roles in schools in another county. Having moved to what is now the lead school in this Trust, to lead performing arts, she was repeatedly encouraged to take promotional moves and ultimately Diane's predecessor asked her to take the headship of a failing primary school which was being sponsored into the Trust. From this she moved to the Trust-wide, executive role she now has.
Margaret West Midlands (group 1)	This Director of Primary Teaching School works in parallel with a secondary colleague. She has a background in a range of primary school leadership positions across the wider region, including headships and including one where she led the significant improvement of what had been a failing school. She reports to Maria (above) and has brought her leadership skills to bear on the TSA's ITT activity (it has a SCITT) and on it wider CPDL work, along with her secondary colleague, making the TSA a high profile one nationally.
Kathryn West Midlands (group 3)	This MAT CEO is also the Headteacher of the lead school in a MAT she recently formed with one other, similar secondary school. She sees herself as a servant leader and worked her way through a number of leadership roles in a range of schools, becoming an NLE and starting a SCITT in her present school. Her school is widely seen as one of the most successful in the region and is located in a socio-economically 'successful' satellite town. She is proud of what she has achieved for her school and sees a carefully-configured small MAT as an opportunity to share her own experience – but in a way that doesn't jeopardise the school's significant success.
Natalie West Midlands (group 3)	This primary-trained Senior Deputy Head works to Kathryn (above) and has a role that involves whole-school decision-making within a senior leadership team in this lead school in a two-school MAT. Having worked with ethnic minority disadvantaged primary pupils she took a similar role a secondary context and has since become a SENCO an AST and then came to her present school as an Assistant Head. She became Head of School but her title reverted to Senior Deputy when the school started the MAT. She retains what she calls a more 'operational' leadership role in the school.
Anneka	This Director of Teaching School also leads the TSA's SCITT and is also a deputy head in the school. Prior to becoming a business studies teacher and head of department she was an

West Midlands (group 3)	area manager in retail and feels she has brought this experience to bear on running a portfolio of costed CPDL within the TSA. Within the TSA Anneka is responsible for their provision of a suite of NPQ and other leadership programmes and she is involved in arranging school-to-school support work beyond the TSA and MAT.
Angela West Midlands (group 5)	This executive headteacher and MAT CEO has worked in senior leadership within the lead school in this trust for over 30 years. As an NLE of long standing, she made her school one of the country's first Teaching Schools, was one of the first to introduce school-based ITT to the region and has more recently seen the opportunities for carefully sponsoring other primary schools in the area into a small primary MAT based around the school with which she has been long-associated.
Jodie West Midlands (group 5)	This Head of School has only ever worked in the school she now leads and in which she has held SENCO and DHT positions. It is the highly successful primary school of which Angela (above) was headteacher for many years and Jodie was appointed by Angela's predecessor. Jodie is highly loyal to Angela who, although she is now in an executive Trust and TSA oversight role, still has her office in Jodie's school. Jodie states that what Angela retires or otherwise leaves, she will leave as well.
Samera West Midlands (group 5)	This Deputy Head of School has also only ever worked within the school Jodie leads and at which Angela was the previous headteacher. She teaches early years children. Like Jodie, Samera was appointed by Angela, having initially been a Teaching Assistant. Samera was made an ITT mentor at an early point in her time at the school and built this interest into ultimately being the Director of Teaching School as well as Deputy Head. Samera is fiercely loyal to the school, Angela, the growing MAT and the TSA.
Robert West Midlands (group 6)	This MAT CEO was originally a peripatetic teacher in another area and then had a range of middle and senior school-based roles leading to headship of the lead school in the MAT, developing a federation of schools and then becoming the MAT CEO. He also developed a SCITT at the school and started the TSA, also based on the MAT's lead school. The MAT has developed a significant reputation for accepting schools needing improvement and now has primary as well as secondary schools. Robert is nationally known for having led a national body for Teaching Schools and having advised government,
Nathaniel West Midlands (group 6)	This Executive Headteacher now leads the school on which the MAT is based. He worked briefly in another school, then returned to his current school before spending several years in a range of other schools in head of department and AHT roles before returning to his current school as DHT. As the MAT and TSA grew the opportunity arose for him to become Headteacher, a role where he now works directly to Robert (above), with him having the title Executive Headteacher and Robert CEO. His school is presently recognised as a highly successful school.
Charlotte	This Director of Teaching School trained as a music teacher and her entire career has been in this MAT's lead school – where Nathaniel is Executive Headteacher. The school became a Performing Arts College and she led this initiative before, following a career break she established the school as a Teaching School – which she now leads. She is now also an AHT

West Midlands (group 6)	at the MAT's lead school. As Director of the TSA, Charlotte also oversees the TSA's SCITT which has a strongly established reputation in the region.
Jill North West (group 2)	This MAT CEO was previously the headteacher of the MAT's lead school for several years. This school is a successful CofE non-selective secondary school in a town with grammar schools. Prior to teaching she worked in the church and in secretarial work in industry and entered teaching in her late 30s. She built her teaching and leadership career in a number of schools in the region and then became headteacher at the MAT's lead school. Having improved the school substantially over a number of years, becoming an NLE, starting a SCITT and a TSA, she cautiously started a small MAT, negotiating carefully with the diocese as she saw her school as likely to benefit from this within a local educational geography that included some schools being taken into national MATs and the nationally successful grammar schools. She has now handed-over the school's leadership to one of her own appointees and says she is careful to retain a distance as CEO.
Michael North West (group 2)	This Principal leads the lead school in the small MAT of which Jill is the CEO. He was appointed to the school by Jill a year after she came to it and has held a number of senior leadership positions at the school prior to taking over from her. Like Jill, he worked elsewhere in the area prior to his current school, becoming a Head of Sixth Form before coming to Jill's school as an AHT. His curricular specialism is economics and business studies. It was Michael who led on developing the TSA and for a period of time he led this. He has also led the school as a Language and as a Technology College.
Georgina North West (group 2)	This Director of Teaching School came to the MAT and TSA after other roles, including in ITT within Higher Education. Prior to entering teaching she worked in industry, latterly managing a furniture factory, employing disabled people. She then trained as a psychology teacher, teaching in schools and then in the university sector. Having then developed a regional expertise in ITT and CPDL, she was recruited to lead the TSA when Michael (above) moved from leading it. She has forged a strong partnership relationship for the TSA and MAT with the ITT faculty at the university for which she previously worked.
Leonora North West (group 4)	This MAT CEO leads an expanding secondary-based MAT. Having trained via a four-year undergraduate route in Scotland, she took a job at this English school which is now the MAT's lead school. She has seen the school as Grant Maintained, as a Foundation school, as a standalone academy and she then led on forming the MAT. She has held several leadership roles in the school, latterly being Head for 10 years. She has helped form local strategic partnership groups and has a high profile nationally, speaking at conferences, working with the RSCs (now RDs) and advising government. She is actively further building the MAT by working with 'struggling' schools, including a primary school, in the local and sub-regional area.
Clive North West (group 4)	This Headteacher of his MAT's lead school has worked in eleven schools, including overseas. He is a mathematician and was a secondary headteacher by his 30s. He has held a number of middle and senior leadership positions and has undertaken regional partnership and collaboration roles working with other Heads in the area. At the time of being interviewed he was under pressure from the CEO (Leonora) to move from the headship of the successful

	lead school to take over a 'failed' academy from another MAT, bringing it into the Trust. He was not keen to do this.
Seb North West (group 4)	This Director of Teaching School worked within LA schools in his county for nearly 40 years and had two primary headships during 30 of those years. He was a well-known headteacher in the county, leading on several initiatives at the county-level. He trained with Ofsted and has undertaken significant numbers of inspections while also being a headteacher. In his latter headship his school was on the board of a local TSA and from that he became the TSAs support officer when he retired from headship. He now leads this TSA with which the MAT of which Leonora is the CEO is a key partner.
Stephen North West (group 7)	This Executive Principal and MAT CEO is an Oxford University educated biological scientist who having tried lab work, decided to return to Oxford to do a PGCE. He quickly became a Head of Biology and then became an AHT and then DHT in a successful secondary school in the south-west. He moved to a DHT position in his present school and became Head three years after that. He set up a Teaching School in collaboration with another local secondary school and then invited the only feeder primary to his school that is not a church school to join his school in forming a MAT. He says he did this because he sensed there was an imperative to be a MAT rather than SAT. His school is now one of the most successful in the county and he has turned down a number of RSC (now RD) requests to take additional schools into the MAT.
Siobhan North West (group 7)	This Headteacher runs a small rural primary school which is the only other member school in the MAT of which Stephen (above) is the CEO. Prior to headship she had trained to teach in Wales and then moved to work in several roles in two other schools in her current area. Her school joined the MAT following an approach by Stephen's school to which Siobhan's school feeds almost all of her school's pupils. All other feeder schools in the area are church schools and are under diocesan pressure to join a diocesan MAT operating in the area if they become academies. Siobhan feels that her school benefits from the MAT partnership with this large, successful secondary school and acknowledges that her school has provided a pragmatic solution to this other school forming a small, local MAT.
Trevor North West (group 7)	This Director of Teaching School has worked in the middle and primary school sectors in two counties. He has had three headships, two whilst still in his 30s and has also been an Executive Headteacher of a school which he moved out of Special Measures. He was one of the country's first NLEs and was a founder member of a local system leaders' group. He became Director of a large TSA and has developed a significant portfolio of NPQ provision. The TSA is also directly associated with a large primary SCITT which he helps lead.